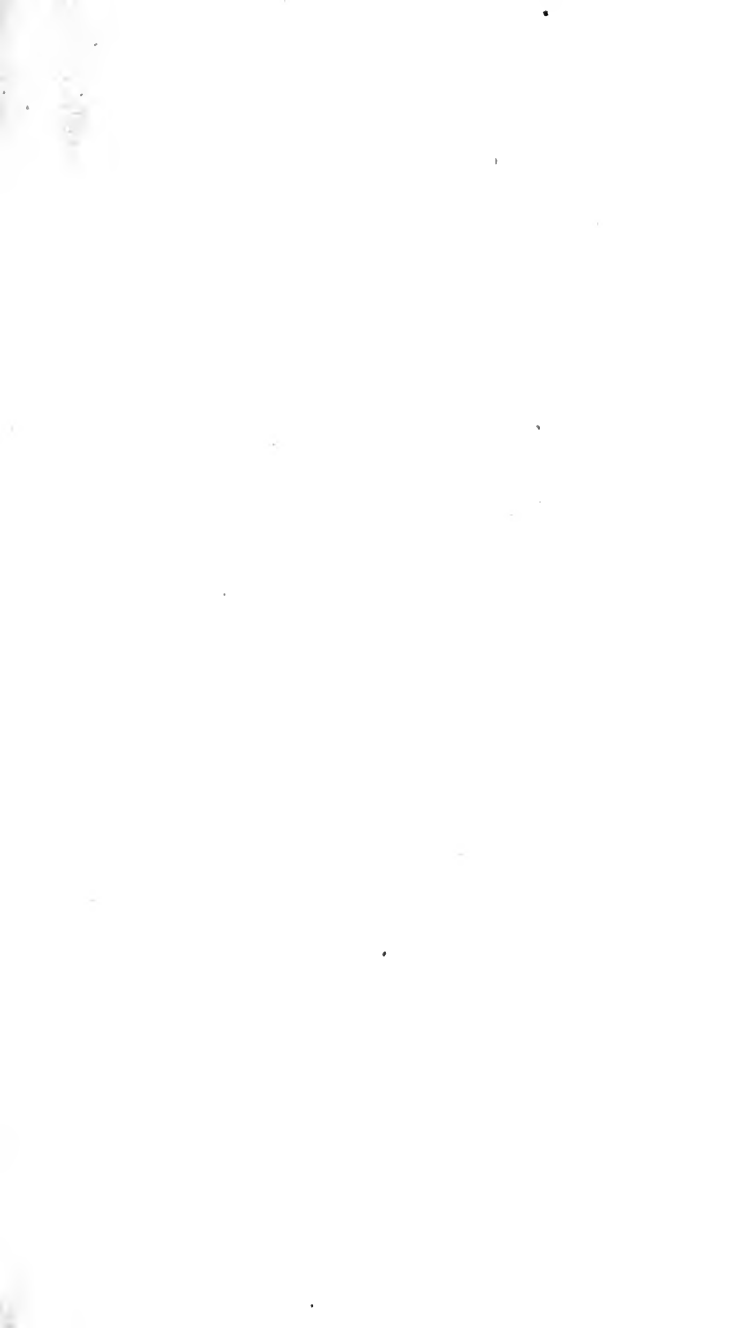




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DOMESTIC SCENES.

VOL. III.

Printed by Strahan and Spottiswoode,
Printers street, London.

DOMESTIC SCENES.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY LADY HUMDRUM,

AUTHOR OF MORE WORKS THAN BEAR HER NAME.

Tedious the tale with lengthen'd lectures fraught :
We're less by precept than example taught.

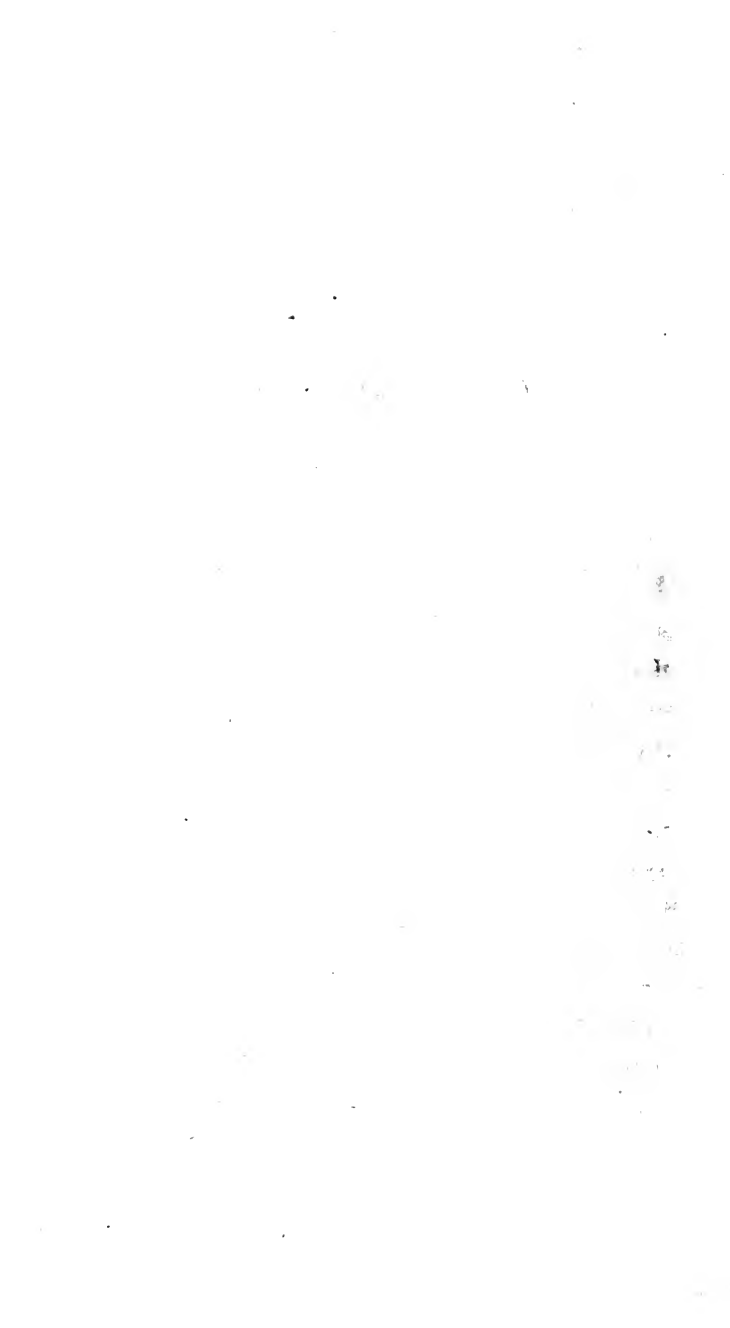
ANONYMOUS.

VOL. III.

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DOMESTIC SCENES.

CHAP. I.

THE return of Henry from the Priory entirely relieved Emily's anxieties respecting its inmates ; nor could she help being amused with Katty's reliance on the efficacy of her P. S.; and still greater amusement did she afterwards, very contrary to her intention, afford her invalid, when in her zeal for the school, and ignorance of localities, she imparted the commission for cheap flannel. The idea of an 'airing Wapping way,' in quest, too, of a shop of which neither the name nor the street could be specified, was so good a joke in Mrs. Valacort's

hands, who had a quick sense of the ridiculous, as not to be readily relinquished. Extremely vexed to have given rise to it, after such a careful suppression of all the rest of the letter, in the anxious desire of saving her correspondent from exposure, Emily earnestly pleaded poor aunt Katty's remote education (brought up in Cornwall by her grandmother), and never having been an inhabitant of London ; but in vain, the laugh continued of provokingly frequent recurrence.

As yet, however, laughing was out of the question ; the patient's sufferings were acute, and not a little aggravated by the fretfulness with which they were endured, although her indefatigable nurse turned her attention with the most unremitting assiduity to their alleviation.

This attendance did not make Emily unmindful of Patty, although her visits to Knightsbridge were necessarily for a time discontinued ; but she received daily accounts of progressive amendment.

When Miss Maxwell was at length admitted to the poor girl, repeated bursts of tears had been the consequence, but no material return of incoherency; and these promising symptoms induced the surgeon to allow of her being informed that her mother had escaped from the flames, as it was believed, unhurt—but had not since been heard of.

Miss Maxwell having engaged that every step should be taken to discover what had become of her, Patty had now fallen into a calm but very depressed state—and resolutely resisted Miss Maxwell's proposal of accepting of an asylum in Lady Sarah's house, for the present—always recurring to her dread that Mrs. Hickson would betray her to George, of whom her apprehensions remained in full force.

As soon as Mrs. Valacort's fever had a little subsided, she called for the list of daily inquiries, and expressed much satisfaction at its length, and at the names

she found on it. On one in particular, her eye rested with marked pleasure. “This manœuvre of mine has succeeded then!” she exclaimed exultingly.

There was something very grating to Emily’s conceptions, both in the word and the boast; so she made no answer. Mrs. Valacort, without attending to it, went on, “You must know I had a very strong desire to visit Lady ——, and had made an ineffectual attempt towards it by the intervention of a third person; but her visiting ticket having been lately left by mistake at my door, I took advantage of the circumstance to return it in a very civil note, stating that being aware it was not intended, I could not take the liberty of availing myself of the mistake, farther than to say, that I meant to see masks on Thursday, and having understood that her daughter Lady Mary was prohibited from going to masquerades, if it could be agreeable to bring her to see masks, there should be the exception

on her ticket of being admitted unmasked; and the consequence is, you see, that she has called in person to inquire after me; so now our visiting will be a thing of course."

"And why is visiting Lady —— so very desirable?"

"Because she is one of the *exclusems*."

"My dear aunt, what are they?"

"The *ton par excellence*, who only associate with each other, and have a slang peculiar to themselves."

So true it is, that let ambition take what course it may, no attainment can satisfy it whilst any thing remains to be attained. Mrs. Valacort had reached that height of fashionable distinction which sets titles at nought. She looked down on many a duchess and countess, as absolute quizzes and fograms—she was admitted to the select parties at B—— and C—— house; but the *exclusems*, as they call themselves, still soared pre-eminent in notoriety; and all

her former atchievements sunk into nothing, whilst this was unobtained. "For she could assure her niece it had occasioned her more anxiety and vexation when repulsed, than she cared to acknowledge."

Emily heartily wished she had not heard it acknowledged now. The triumph in the manœuvre was, however, of short duration; for in Mrs. Valacort's eagerness to complete it, she sent for the porter up to ask what Lady —— had said? when, alas! it appeared that it was Lady Mary only who had called, and taken the opportunity of making her mother appear more civil than she would ever have thought of being herself; for Lady Mary was one of the few instances that mothers may serve as beacons, as well as examples. She was altogether as obliging, as the countess was haughty; and here ended the result of the manœuvre, for of Mrs. Valacort's card of thanks, when it finally went, no farther notice was taken.

The list of inquiry was so considerable, and so many people were put down as having called themselves, that Emily expected the house would overflow with visitors, whenever her aunt should be well enough to admit all her select friends; and she looked forward with pleasure to the freedom she might by this means obtain of devoting an hour occasionally to Lady Sarah and Miss Maxwell, who continued to gain upon her esteem every time she saw them.

Meanwhile it appeared from Sophia's letters, that she did not mean to let Winny return to her place about Agatha—and a disappointment in her expectation of the speedy arrival of Mrs. Fitzclare was the more felt, she said, as she was not quite satisfied with her present attendant—this immediately suggested the idea of Patty's fitness for the situation. Emily consulted her aunt upon it; who, eager for any thing that could vary the tedium of her confinement, said she

must see her before she could give an opinion.

Miss Maxwell, who had now gained daily admission to the sick room, offered to fetch her, which was accepted. The moment she appeared, Mrs. Valacort exclaimed, "Lord bless me! how like she is to Almeria Delmere!" and her husband agreed in the opinion. Emily then mentioned her also having been struck on first seeing her, with a general air of resemblance to Agatha, which had greatly increased the interest she felt for her.

Patty's manner and answers to the various interrogatories put to her, made a favourable impression. She warmly expressed her gratitude for the kindness she had met with, and seemed very eager for the situation proposed to her, provided her mother, when found, did not again require her care and attendance.

On the subject of her mother, some curiosity was excited, but she was reluc-

tant to say much. Her mother had met with misfortunes in early life, which had caused her to change her name to Benson, she said, but was silent upon the nature of them ; they had earned their livelihood by plain work—her father she had never seen—her mother would sometimes sink into a state of deep melancholy for weeks together, and had no support or comfort but her—and she knew of no relations.

All this afforded no clue for the researches setting on foot ; Miss Maxwell, however, engaged for their being unremittingly continued, and Mrs. Valacort approved of Patty's being immediately proposed to Mrs. Delmere, which Emily undertook with great alacrity.

Mrs. Valacort had never been confined two days by illness in her life, and she had every requisite for trying the patience of her nurses in the highest perfection. Her habits had all been fostered in the school of self-indulgence. She hated slops and insipids—murmured at every

species of restraint—loathed whatever she was allowed to take—insisted upon being tempted with high dishes—resisted early hours—took every method, in short, that could keep up her fever, and retard her recovery. Her impatience for admitting visitors too was unbounded; she was convinced she should never get better, till her ennui could be relieved by seeing a rubber played by her sofa; as to playing herself, that she knew she must long despair of, from the disability of her right arm; had it but luckily been the left, the comfort might have been more speedily obtained.

The earliest opportunity was taken to bring her back to her own apartment on the first floor; and the fever no sooner subsided, than she became resolute in ordering that the inquirers, who called in person, should be apprised of her intention to admit one at a time; but this being the very gayest season of the year, when breakfastings and waltz practis-

ings, &c. &c. filled up the whole of the day as completely as balls and assemblies did of the night, the obliging solicitude of her intimates had considerably relaxed, particularly as it was understood that her confinement was likely to last through the summer; the personal calls were, therefore, now only followed up by the few who were ambitious of establishing some sort of claim upon the future civilities of so fashionable a woman, and even these deemed it quite sufficient to sit a quarter of an hour by her sofa in a forenoon occasionally. To her intimation of "How much greater the charity would be in an evening, if they could find leisure to bestow an hour or two upon a poor invalid;" they replied, with every assurance of their full intention to indulge themselves in so great a pleasure, and the pains they would take to mention her wish wherever they went; but charitable intentions were a little apt to be obliterated by matters of greater

moment with Mrs. Valacort's associates ; and as to *friendship*, she knew exactly the value of *that* in her *set* ; and forebore to have recourse to it, till she should be well enough to hold out the attraction of a rubber at French fives. Nor was it very long before she insisted upon making this experiment ; being now regularly moved on to the ottomane in her boudoir, she persuaded Mr. Valacort to assemble three whist players, and let the table be so placed that she might overlook his hand, and bet upon the rubber ; the consequence was, that she was kept up beyond the proper time—that she agitated herself by the importance of her bets, and cavilling at her husband's play, who might have won a rubber which he lost—and having moreover obstinately ordered a rich soup for her supper she passed a sleepless night—the fever returned with renewed force, and the knitting of the bone was of course protracted.

When her surgeon was informed of what had given rise to the relapse, he became peremptory in his mandate; and enforced the importance of her submitting to it so strenuously to Mr. Valacort and Emily, that they fully saw the necessity of resisting her imprudences in future, and agreed to be steady and united; and, in fact, it required considerably more of firmness than either of them had been in the habit of opposing to her wishes to withstand the various modes she took to obtain her own way; particularly when she contrived to make herself considerably worse by the effects of mere irritation; however, they stood their ground, and she was at length obliged to submit, and be satisfied with her family party, and the quiet addition of only Miss Maxwell. As she again became better, Colonel Maxwell and Lord Cranmore were admitted; and these supplied amusement, not only by their conversation, but by bringing any

new entertaining publication that appeared; and many that had long been published were new to Mrs. Valacort, who never found a moment to look into any book beyond the 'Court Guide.'

Emily was usually the reader, and all the more animated from the desire of captivating her aunt's attention, who was in reality far from being destitute of mind; it had only lain dormant under the influence of that powerful soporific, dissipation, which steals imperceptibly over the senses, deadening them by degrees to all the finer feelings of moral life. She was soon compelled to acknowledge that an evening might be got over without either cards or scandal; and it was not very long before she felt, and confessed, that they passed *not* unpleasantly; for the hour of eleven sometimes came with a rapidity that rather surprised her.

The harp and pianoforte also occasionally found their place in producing an interesting variety; and the expres-

sion Emily knew how to give to the simplest ballad, called up a new taste in Mrs. Valacort, which proved her to be not altogether as devoid of ear as she had believed; in short, rational feelings began to resume their place in her mind. Lady Sarah and Miss Maxwell, those reprobated blue-stockings, became not only bearable, but even desirable companions.

Here was a triumph for Emily! and a good arising out of evil beyond what she could have dared to hope. O! that it might but acquire power to resist the fascinations that would again assail her restoration to health! that it might not merely be the result of disappointed vanity, in discovering the hollowness of worldly friendship!

CHAP. II.

LORD Cranmore had for some time past seen daily increasing cause for displeasure in his sister's conduct ; finding Lord Belmont blind, or choosing to appear so, he felt the necessity of taking some step ; and though doubtful of his own influence over her, he determined to try its power before he had recourse to other interference.

She had just risen, when he called upon her, and was preparing for her airing ; he proposed accompanying her, to which she assented in a manner that clearly showed it was not her wish.

“ I can so seldom find you otherwise than surrounded, Sabina,” he began, as they were stepping into the carriage, “ that a tête à tête will have all the charm of novelty to recommend it.”

“ A domestic tête à tête should have some peculiar recommendation to give it a zest ; for in general it is but dull work,” was the ungracious reply.

“ I cannot help regretting,” he resumed, “ that Belmont’s post should be of a nature to require so much of his attendance, as it robs you both of his society and protection.”

“ I have no particular fancy for his being tied to my apron-string.”

“ No ; of course it is not desirable for a woman to be made particular in any way.”

“ I don’t know as to that, if it were in a way that could flatter one !”

“ The affection of a husband is undoubtedly what a wife might be excused for taking a pride in.”

“ I am in no great danger of having mine excited in that quarter ; you must be sensible that it is not easy to be more completely neglected than I am by mine.”

“ I am sensible certainly that Belmont is too fashionable to make a parade of his affection in public, and unfortunately too much engrossed by his office to admit of his finding time for domestic enjoyments.”

“ Domestic enjoyments !” she repeated with a sneer ; “ I am as willing to absolve him, as he can be to escape from those ; but I confess I did not look for the humiliation of being so publicly slighted in so very short a time.”

“ If you see cause, my dear Sabina, to accuse him of want of affection, it will I am sure induce you to be doubly guarded in encouraging the admiration of others.”

“ What do you mean by that, Cranmore ?”

“ I mean that an apparently neglected wife becomes an immediate object of pursuit to the dissolute, even were she not possessed of a hundredth part of your attractions ; in you there is every additional motive for the most scrupulous caution.”

“ Ha ! ha ! ha !—what a dainty speech ! a most enviable situation I shall have got into, indeed ; if, because I have had the misfortune to bestow my hand upon an insensible, I should be obliged to shut my eyes and ears to all the rest of mankind ! No, no—a little innocent flirtation is all the comfort left me now, and trust me, I’ll not forego that from any regard to ill-natured misconstruction.”

“ You will, I think, give me credit, Sabina, for not being prone to ill-natured misconstruction, especially where you are in question ; but I must say that I could wish to see you keep the Duke of Ulswater at a greater distance.”

“ The Duke of Ulswater !” colouring

violently, “ I should be glad to know why you select him in particular, when there are at least half a dozen equally devoted to me !”

“ Because the Duke marks by his manner, either that he considers himself, or wishes the world to consider him, in a very different degree of favour from any of your other admirers ; but even to talk of admirers to a married woman appears to me an insult to her delicacy.”

“ Lord ! Lord !—such nonsense !—do pray look round, and see whether there be a married woman of my acquaintance without a *Cicisbeo*, except Lady Darenty, indeed, and Mrs. Alston ; the one such a scarecrow, that the wonder is, how even her immense fortune could allure any man to approach her ; and the other, with her turtle cooing after her wherever she goes, and ready to fight every man that but looks towards her.”

“ It is but too true indeed, Sabina, that the circle of your acquaintance offer

examples of profligacy and depravity in abundance ; but far be it from my sister to make any of those her excuse for deviating, in the security of conscious innocence, into such odious appearances!" This was spoken with a seriousness of emotion that rather embarrassed her.

" Pray, Cranmore, has Belmont commissioned you to admonish me on this head?"

" God forbid that Belmont should have the cause of alarm given him which I feel! no—it is my own anxiety that prompts my speaking to you upon this delicate subject."

" It would at all events in him have looked something like caring about me ; but I beg leave to reap this benefit at least from the misfortune of having a husband, to hold myself amenable to no other jurisdiction."

" And is it possible, Sabina, that you should expect your family to remain un-

concerned in any thing that may affect your reputation?"

"Reputation! Lord, whose reputation can escape from the shafts of envy and malice?—I shall certainly not give way to such considerations, whilst I know my own innocence; time enough to become guarded when there is any thing to hide, as Joseph Surface observes; besides, don't you see that I have my husband's sister always at my elbow? what better security can you, or can the world desire for propriety of conduct than that?"

"If there be no better security in your own principles, Sabina—Alas for my sister!"

"I declare, Cranmore, you're becoming quite a Methodist; or rather you are imbibing all the antiquated notions of that prude Emily Villars; though, by the bye, even she is no enemy to a little innocent flirtation!"

"I abominate the very word, Sabina! Innocence can scarcely ever go along

with it. But what do you mean by accusing Miss Villars? surely, if ever immaculate purity dwelt in a human breast, it will be found in hers!”

“ Oh dear! of course—so every lover thinks of his mistress—but I suppose you know she was dying for Belmont before he married me, and now carries on a respectable platonic intercourse with him!”

“ Impossible! Miss Villars is—”

“ Ask Laura what she is!” interrupted Sabina.

“ Lady Laura is no oracle of mine,” colouring at the painful idea awakened in his mind.

Just at that moment the conversation was stopped, by the Duke of Ulswater’s appearance at the side of the carriage, which cleared up to Lord Cranmore the meaning of his sister’s ungracious acceptance of his proposal, for, contrary to her habitual custom of airing in Hyde Park, she had gone the Edgware road.

The Duke laid his hand upon the coach-door, and was beginning a very familiar address, when he half started upon perceiving who was with her. "The last person he could have expected to find cooped up in a carriage for the purpose of an airing," he said, affecting to laugh.

"So I should suppose," was the dry reply.

He congratulated himself, however, upon the circumstance, and his having so luckily taken that road for quietness, as his young horse was not yet trained to the humours of the Park ; and he then proceeded to propose what he said he could not have ventured to do, had she been accompanied by a less respectable chaperon—that she should alight and accept of his arm—the day having turned out so uncommonly fine.

Lord Cranmore remonstrated with his sister upon the risk of her walking in her feeble state.

But having recovered from the confusion the Duke's appearance had caused her, from a doubt of how her brother might behave to him, she now, with admirable presence of mind, seized the opportunity of making *him* seem to sanction the very intimacy he was reprobating. She averred that walking was exactly what Doctor —— most strongly recommended, when it could be done without fatigue; and therefore she had meant to propose to her brother, driving to the Bayswater gate of Kensington Gardens, at their return, as the number of seats made that preferable to keeping on a longer stretch; and two arms were better support than one, if the Duke liked to accompany them.

This was of course politely acceded to, and Lord Cranmore, from a compassionate unwillingness to agitate his sister in her present situation, was compelled to countenance what he could

not avert. His deportment, however, was marked by a taciturnity, and a frigidity of manner so unequivocal, as could not well pass unobserved by his Grace.

CHAP. III.

LORD Cranmore had given little credit to his sister's assertion of Emily's love for Belmont, but he quite believed Belmont to have been attached to her, and recollected many instances of his still continuing so ; but none of any encouragement given ; on the contrary, he had seen her cold and repulsive to him. He was wounded, however, with the thought of so dishonourable a circumstance as his sister's husband's daring to nourish a passion for the pure and lovely being, to whom his very existence was devoted. He had from the first moment of his ad-

miration of her, determined upon the frank avowal of his own situation, before he ventured to solicit her hand ; but the timidity of true passion, combined with the fear of offending her delicacy, by the disclosure he had to make, had thus far checked the embarrassing explanation ; he now, however, gained fortitude from anxiety to become her authorised protector, and resolved to run the hazard without delay.

The conversation in Stanhope Street had turned, on the preceding evening, upon a case somewhat similar to Lord Cranmore's own ; and Emily had expressed unqualified disapprobation of a lady who had married with the knowledge that her husband, a Scotchman, had grown-up children by a prior connection ; and fully apprised that, provided he had contracted no other marriage, he might have legitimated them, according to the laws of his own country, by ac-

knowledging their mother to be his wife, even upon his death-bed.

Mrs. Valacort had sedulously changed the subject upon observing the agitation betrayed in Lord Cranmore's countenance. Alarmed lest something might have come to Emily's knowledge to call forth such strength of expression, he was the more forcibly impelled to hasten the explanation; and on the ensuing morning called at so early an hour, as to preclude the danger of interruption, and sent up an earnest request to see Miss Villars in the drawing-room.

Thither, not in her most tranquil state, she soon came down to him.

With considerable circumlocution he led to her severe condemnation of Mrs. Jackson, the foregoing evening, and asked whether she carried her idea the length of excluding every one from marriage whose early unguardedness had been attended with similar consequences?"

Rather surprised at his recurrence to such a subject, as well as with the very indulgent terms in which he expressed himself, and not re-assured by his visible emotion and tremulous utterance, she hesitatingly pleaded disqualification to discuss the point.

But he repeated the question with increased earnestness, and she replied, "That she could imagine no plea of exemption for a parent's not rescuing his offspring from obloquy."

"In Scotland only could it be so averted," he said.

"I thought it was of a Scotchman we were speaking."

"But put the case elsewhere."

"I should conceive it then to turn upon the character and conduct of the mother; but surely, my lord, this is a strange subject for me to be urged upon, unless to make me sensible of my impropriety in bringing my opinion so forward last night."

He changed colour. "I seem to deserve so severe a reproof," he said, "for the apparent want of delicacy I am guilty of, in pressing such a point; but in very truth, Miss Villars,—I—I—am painfully constrained to it."—He stopt in the most evident confusion.

Emily looked at him with surprise.

"You cannot, Miss Villars, I think, have been unconscious—you must have perceived—that is, I mean I must have betrayed sentiments which—forgive my inability to find expressions for what I have to say—the destiny of my whole life hangs upon the result of this conversation."

He again stopped, unable to proceed.

Having felt no wish to discourage his sentiments, she could not account for the extraordinary dread he seemed to have in their disclosure; but not very able to speak herself, she awaited the recovery of his self-possession in silence.

After a struggle of some minutes, he

went on. “ I have a confession to make that must degrade me in your eyes—an involvement of my early youth—” Again he stopped.

She now changed colour.

Without venturing to look up, he at length proceeded : “ Do not, I conjure you, suspect me of profligacy ; or of ever having harboured a premeditated design of seduction—I never for an instant attempted to deceive her by the most distant hint at marriage—I even fled when I became aware the liking was mutual—for she was good—innocent—but those about her were artful—and in an evil hour—what shall I say!—temptation triumphed over principle—and formed a connexion which—I cannot go on.—”

He sunk, overpowered by his emotion, on the sofa, and hid his face upon the end of it.

Little less agitated than himself, by a confession for which she was so unprepared,

Emily, however, had sufficient command of herself to say, "A connexion sacred in the eye of heaven, surely, if she was innocent and good—"

"O no!—not sacred in the light you take it!—never—never had I the most remote idea of making her my wife, or she of expecting it. Of her you should never have heard—but the children!—I could not bear to deceive you with respect to them—a lovely girl and boy."

"Assuredly, my lord, you *owe* yourself to them. I honour you for the feeling," speaking with assumed firmness and rising with dignity.

"O stay, Miss Villars!—stay!—do not misconceive me! I owe them every amends, save one!—not the sacrifice of the happiness of my whole life, if independently of them you could have deigned to embellish it—not to relinquish my adoration of you—"

"Excuse me, Lord Cranmore—this is a very unlooked-for trial. I do not scru-

ple to avow it is a trial, though I trust I shall prove equal to it—but—”

“Dearest! most candid of women!” throwing himself rapturously at her feet; “the trial ceases, the instant you consider it as such. I have only been impelled to this disclosure from the apprehension that an after discovery would sink me in your esteem, if you condescended to entrust the future happiness of your life to me; and now that this blessed avowal proves me not degraded in your eyes, no farther consideration is—”

“Hold, my lord!—hold!” interrupting him; “rise, I entreat you!—there is too surely cause for the most serious consideration! far more serious than can be thus hastily dismissed.—It is, indeed, a subject I am not at any rate qualified to judge of, without the assistance of my parents, whose opinion has ever determined any important act of my life.—”

“Surely, Miss Villars, in a point where

your feelings alone are concerned, you alone can judge—”

“Excuse me, my lord!—in a case of such peculiar delicacy, my only security for not erring will be to refer it wholly to my mother. With her your lordship can enter into particulars, which it would neither become me to inquire into, or to be informed of.”

“And can you! whose ‘wisdom is gentle’ as that ‘from above,’ can you, with a severity so foreign to your nature, refer me to a tribunal where the most rigid moral justice only may be looked for? too well do I know the penalty I have there incurred!—but there are circumstances of mitigation, which to a mind so sweetly tempered with mercy as yours could not be pleaded in vain.”

“You do not know my mother, Lord Cranmore, if you doubt her principles being tempered with all the mercy that a due regard for morals can admit of. You say there are mitigating circumstances—

to her those may be pleaded, with the certainty that full weight will be give to them. I cannot hear them—or even if I could,” she added precipitately, seeing him eager to interrupt her; “still must the ultimate decision rest with my mother—never should I know ease or comfort in acting contrary to her opinion.”

“But could I be so fortunate as to awaken any one sympathetic feeling in your breast; how much might it not contribute to soften Mrs. Villars’s verdict!”

“I entreat you not to urge me beyond my sense of right!—I have surely said enough to prove that I do not look with indifference to the result; but pray excuse me this morning. I really am unequal to the discussion—and suffer me to decline entering upon it again till I shall have stated to my mother what has now passed, and obtained her opinion to guide my future conduct!”

“Nay, then indeed, you leave me no

resource, but to make my own appeal to her, because all turns upon the details from which your delicacy shrinks; but which, believe me, I should not offer to relate, if the slightest wound could be given to it by the communication."

Emily had been taken by surprise, and was conscious of her weakness; she abided by her reference, and put an abrupt end to the conversation.

Much cause indeed she had to distrust herself! Lord Cranmore had acquired that hold upon her affections, to which his merits entitled him, and of which she was not herself fully aware, till this very unforeseen blow seemed necessarily to sever them at once; and in this first moment of dismay, she looked in vain for the fortitude that had so effectually rescued her in her former trial.

Finding that Miss Maxwell had been admitted to Mrs. Valacort, during Lord Cranmore's visit, she retired to her own apartment to recover some degree of

composure before she exposed her pale face to those inquiring eyes she did not yet wish to open to the subject, aware, from her present knowledge of her aunt's character, that she should be weakened instead of strengthened by *her* arguments.

‘ She was good and innocent !’—these words vibrated in her ear and upon her heart. If ‘ good and innocent !’ then betrayed—whether by him or those meaning to serve him, could make little difference. She was lost to virtue through his means,—wretched of course—and he certainly owed her the only reparation he could make—from this there seemed to be no appeal—unless, indeed, subsequent misconduct had rendered her unworthy !—but he had insinuated nothing of the kind—“ far ! far be it from the high soul of Lord Cranmore !” she exclaimed, unconsciously to herself ; “ to seek shelter in mean subterfuge !”

This exclamation was followed by a

plentiful effusion of tears, which gave some relief to her oppressed heart.

It was a considerable length of time before she felt sufficiently recovered to venture into her aunt's presence; and the very instant she did so, the attack was made, which she had hoped to escape. Miss Maxwell, to whom she had looked as her shield of defence, was gone; her first inquiry had been for Emily, and being informed she was engaged with Lord Cranmore in the drawing-room, she had made this report to Mrs. Valacort upon gaining admission to her. Such acceptable intelligence at once awakened all the hopes and all the curiosity that might be expected on a subject of such deep interest—they were not to be concealed from so true a well-wisher to her niece; and she very frankly expressed her desire to be left alone, the moment Lord Cranmore was gone, that she might obtain the immediate communication of what had passed.

It may be supposed, that her patience had been put to the test during the time that elapsed before her niece made her appearance ; concluding, however, from the very delay that the subject had been agitating, and not surmising it possible to have had a result different from her wishes, she had conquered her eagerness for the particulars, so far as not to have sent to hurry her into her presence ; but she was no sooner within the door, than Mrs. Valacort, in her most triumphant tone, began, “ Well Emily !—has his lordship at length given utterance to the tender hopes and fears that have so long held warfare in his breast ?”

Emily was for a moment unable to reply.

“ Lord, my dear child ! what’s the matter ?—you look ready to sink into the earth, instead of raising your crest to the high honours that await you !—good heaven ! you terrify me to death ! what

ails you?—for mercy's sake, what has he been saying to you?"

"What reflects the highest honour upon his sincerity," said the agitated girl, "and makes it very clear, that neither his hopes nor his fears ought to turn upon me."

"Emily, are you mad?—what can you mean by *ought*? have not his every look and action proclaimed his whole soul devoted to you ever since your arrival in town?"

"He has indeed shown a preference; but, my dear aunt, he has no right to give way to such a feeling—he has in the most honourable manner been acknowledging—"

"Acknowledging a fiddlestick!" interrupted Mrs. Valacort angrily; "some stuff about that woman, I suppose! Emily, I hope you won't be such an idiot as to imagine an affair of that nature an impediment to honourable wedlock."

"It seems to me of a nature to pre-

clude all chance of happiness in a marriage so cruelly contracted at the expence of another."

"Lord help you, child! if you are never to marry till you meet with a Sir Charles Grandison, that faultless monster! the only attempt even in fiction to draw an immaculate hero, and see the deserved ridicule it has met with!"

Emily hoping to turn off the subject, answered, "Surely, my dear aunt, it is to the conceit and formality of Sir Charles Grandison that the ridicule attaches, and not to his rigid morality."

"Well! well!" impatiently interrupting her; "for pity's sake don't let us enter into a critical dissertation now! keep that for our evening *blues*; what I meant to say, and what I insist upon, is, that if you expect to meet with a man who has never had an affair of gallantry upon his hands, you must seek your lovers among the college quizzes; and even these, upon my life, I should doubt;

but in a man of the world, it's a downright absurdity to expect it, and I can't conceive what could put it into his fool's head to speak to you upon such a subject ; it was the height of indelicacy moreover—I wonder you would listen to him !—For heaven's sake, what did he say ?”

“ Indeed, I can scarcely tell you ; but it seems that an innocent and good young woman has been drawn into error by him —”

“ And by way of making love to you, he comes to tell you this !—I never heard of any thing half so preposterous in my days !—what any other man in the world would have concealed with his utmost care from such a little prude as he must have discovered you to be !”

“ Surely, you are pronouncing the highest encomium on his noble nature, incapable of seeking to owe any thing to concealment !”

“ But where will be the advantage of his noble nature, if, instead of obtaining

him a wife, it foils his wishes ; it would have been a good deal wiser to have proceeded in the common way, and left such discoveries to chance. You might never have happened to hear of it at all—and if you did—when once married there would have been no remedy but to make the best of it.”

“ He paid me the compliment, to think my delicacy might have been wounded by the discovery, to the utter destruction of all confidence in him, and consequently all chance of future happiness.”

“ Then, my dear, he paid you the compliment of taking you for a perfect idiot ; for no woman endowed with common sense would let her happiness be destroyed by a circumstance that had occurred before ever she was acquainted with her husband.”

“ Not if the circumstance were discreditable to his moral character ?—good heavens !”

“ But really, Emily, it is talking almost

like a natural, to say, that in these days it is a reflection upon a young man to have kept a mistress. He will, I dare say, make the handsomest provision for her and for her children—”

“ Her children !—you knew of it then, dear aunt ?”

“ Lord ! to be sure I did.”

“ And never warned me of it, when you saw his particular attentions to me !”

“ Why, what nonsense it would have been ! Could I suppose you such a ninny as to mind it ?”

“ But she was good and innocent till she knew him !”

“ Yes—so I suppose they all are, some time or other.”

“ Be assured, there was something very peculiar in this case !”

“ Well, pray let’s hear it then !”

“ I could not bring myself to let him impart the circumstances.”

“ Upon my word and honour, if this

wasn't so very provoking, I could laugh at it as the best joke I ever heard of—here have you discarded one of the first men in England, both in rank and character, because he once kept a mistress under some supposed peculiarity of circumstances—with which you are wholly unacquainted. I vow to heaven, Emily, you are enough to drive one wild, with your rhodomontade nonsense !”—

“ My kind good aunt ! only do have patience with me, till you hear the result of my referring him to my mother !”

“ Referring him to your mother !” she repeated ; “ why, my dear sweet girl, why did you not say so at first—certainly nothing could be better or more proper than a reference to your parent—no fear of her giving way to such folly ! I shouldn't have had another word to say, except that I would rather the compliment had in the first instance been paid to myself—however, I shan't quarrel for trifles—but I

thought you had been such a little wrong-headed simpleton, as to have given a flat refusal."

Emily could make no other answer than a fresh gush of tears, and her aunt sought to make amends for the worry of this conversation, by all the soothings she could devise.

CHAP. IV.

LORD Cranmore, however impatient to set off for the Priory, felt it incumbent upon him to have an interview with the Duke of Ulswater before leaving town. He had already made one or two ineffectual attempts for that purpose, but his Grace had prudently formed a party for an excursion of a few days, in consequence of Lady Sabina's report to him of her brother's lecture, as she called it. Laura having understood that Emily's visit drew towards a close, it was natural to calculate upon Lord Cranmore's removal to his cottage whenever she went away ;

which would leave the duke's assiduities free, and in the meanwhile his absence appeared expedient.

Lord Cranmore now sent a note of inquiry 'when he might be sure of finding the duke at home?' and his servant brought him word that no time was fixed for his return, neither were any orders left where to forward letters to him. The certainty of his absence was some satisfaction, and the visit to the Priory suffered not another instant's delay.

The present inmate of Boxmount Cottage, presented its owner, with an aspect expressive of an exhilaration of spirits, so different from any thing that might ever again have been expected in him, and a heart so overflowing with rapturous admiration of every person and thing belonging to the Villars family, that Lord Cranmore could not but hail it as an auspicious omen for himself.

On the day after his arrival, Mrs. Villars

dispatched a letter to Emily, of which the following was a part.

‘ You never fail, my beloved child, to answer my fondest hopes upon any occasion that calls your principles and your delicacy into action ; nothing can be more strongly marked with both, than your conduct to Lord Cranmore—it has your father’s and my unqualified approbation ; and you will, I trust, reap the full reward of it, in the sanction we give to your encouragement of his lordship’s addresses.

‘ He has with the candour and sincerity so peculiarly his own, informed us of every circumstance respecting his unfortunate connexion, and we can see no claim the unhappy girl is entitled to make upon him. She was clearly and purposefully thrown into his way, notwithstanding the honourable and fixed determination to avoid her, which he formed the moment he became conscious of his preference for her ; and she appears to have been

guided solely by her passion, without the slightest compunction for the total dereliction of every virtuous principle; on no occasion whatever has she hinted the most distant wish or expectation of becoming his wife—to such a person there can be no obligation on his part to sacrifice the honours and interests of his family; neither could the children be rescued in this country by a subsequent marriage from the stigma of their birth, should consideration for them be the plea.

‘The provision he has made for them and their mother is suitable to the generosity of his nature, and to the affluence of the family.

‘You will not even have the painful thought of being the cause of their separation. He determined upon it on leaving England, before he was acquainted with you, and has faithfully adhered to the determination. Enjoy therefore, my Emily, without a drawback, the happiness of having obtained by your virtues the

esteem so necessary to ensure the durability of conjugal felicity, and receive Lord Cranmore as the approved lover we should have selected for you, out of a thousand.'

It will be unnecessary to dilate upon the feelings with which Emily read this letter ; they may readily be conceived, as well as their effect upon her expressive countenance, when her first emotions had sufficiently subsided to admit of her resorting to Mrs. Valacort's apartment, with the letter in her hand.

" Ah Emily !—I triumph !" was her instantaneous exclamation ; " my brother and sister are rational beings, I perceive ! no romantic nonsense about them !"

Emily gave her aunt the letter.

" Aye—aye—it's all very well !—I am glad they have hit upon any ground to satisfy your fastidiousness ; but I should have thought them great fools, if they had wanted all these fiddle-cum-fads to satisfy themselves."

Emily could not but regret the entire worldliness of her aunt's perceptions, however she felt no disposition just then for entering into argument; and a visitor luckily dropping in, she sat down to the work-table, in silent enjoyment of the most heartfelt happiness.

Of the sensations which at this time filled every bosom at the Priory, it is not easy to give an adequate idea—the period of expected good is, perhaps, that of the most unmingled bliss this life has to bestow—the whole mind is absorbed in it, and raised above the habitual condition of humanity.

Mr. and Mrs. Villars idolized Emily, and saw a prospect opening to her, beyond their most sanguine hopes. Sophia was daily recovering the tone of her energetic mind and fine spirits. Sir Edward Arundel appeared to be making a rapid progress in her esteem, and they judged that a felicity was now in store for her, which they had not again dared

to look for. Agatha's eager affectionate disposition and quick intelligence, her wild enjoyment of every passing pleasure, varied and animated the scene, whilst every succeeding day brought with it the fairest promise to Sophia of her answering to her fondest wish. Aunt Katty was in a paroxysm of delight, bordering upon intoxication, with the matrimonial prospects of her two nieces, which she now deemed as good as completed; Sir Edward Arundel was happiness personified; and Lord Cranmore's countenance was the faithful index of the silent rapture of his soul, in having obtained the concurrence he so dreaded to seek. Could such exquisite sensations be permanent, this world were Paradise, instead of the appointed state of probation we have cause to think it.

The arrival of Patty was still an increase of satisfaction to Mrs. Delmere, as it secured to Agatha the care of one who might thoroughly be confided in, till

the arrival of Mrs. Fitzclare, which had been repeatedly delayed. The letters received from her, breathed gratitude in every line, and at the same time acknowledged the fruitlessness of her researches; but still a vague hope of ultimate success, which she knew not how to forego, continued afloat in her mind, and her departure was protracted from week to week.

The interesting appearance of Patty, as well as her resemblance to Agatha, instantly impressed Sophia in her favour, and she was eager to produce her to Sir Edward Arundel. He started and changed colour at sight of her, and with difficulty suppressed an exclamation of surprise, not only at her likeness to Agatha's mother, which had so forcibly struck Mrs. Valacort, but her still stronger resemblance to another unfortunate, of whose melancholy story he knew but too much. "Strange coincidence indeed! that should now bring *this* girl under *this*

roof!" was the reflection that arose to his mind; and he promised himself to seize the first unobserved opportunity of ascertaining the fate of her wretched parent.

The extraordinary expression of Sir Edward's countenance did not escape the penetrating eye of Sophia; she made no observation upon it however, at the moment, not doubting but he would explain it when occasion offered.

Meanwhile Lord Cranmore had returned to town in the fulness of hope and joy, having only just given time for Mrs. Villars's letter to precede him. Emily's reception in no shape impeached her filial obedience; Mr. and Mrs. Valacort knew not how to make enough of him; and all was happiness and hilarity also in Stanhope Street. Not but it must be confessed that a silent tear would at times stray down the cheek of Emily, as she dwelt upon the sad blot in Lord Cranmore's early conduct. She was sure

he had every extenuation to plead, that such a circumstance could admit of, or her mother would not have exonerated him; but still she had cherished the idea of his moral perfection in her heart's core — and alas! alas! he had fallen short!

The progress of Mrs. Valacort's recovery was extremely slow; confinement and impatience had produced a considerable degree of nervous irritation, and change of air was advised. Emily strongly urged a visit to the Priory, relying much upon the assistance of its inmates in furthering her aunt's mental improvement, as well as upon the salubrious air of the Downs for strengthening her physical powers.

Mrs. Valacort was more than commonly acquiescent, from the desire of contributing by her influence to hurry on the marriage she had so much at heart; and readily gave way to her niece's persuasions: not that she could wholly divest

herself of the apprehension of the dulness that must result from a protracted stay among habits so dissimilar to those she had been accustomed to transplant, together with her tonish associates, from Stanhope Street to the Abbey ; where the chief difference between town and country life consisted in the substitution of billiards and morning whist, for shopping and morning visits ; but affection for Emily prompted the sacrifice, and she magnanimously set dulness at defiance.

A contrivance was fallen upon for lifting her in and out of the carriage without injury to the broken arm ; the ankle not yet admitting of her attempting to rest upon it. Miss Maxwell was prevailed on to join the party ; Lord Cranmore attended of course ; and the happy set arrived at the Priory, to complete the general satisfaction. Emily was received with that exuberance of joyous feeling which arose from the full persuasion that

her prospect was now as fair as this sublunary state can offer. A meeting between Mrs. Villars and her brother had not taken place of some years, and his mild good-humoured agreeable manners made him at all times a desirable guest. Miss Maxwell, with her animated intelligent dark eye — ever-varying countenance, in which good sense and good humour were happily blended — frank manners and affectionate heart, quite answered to the expectations Emily had raised of her ; and with these enlivening accessions to the family circle, time stole on unperceived in heartfelt domestic enjoyment, to the astonishment of Mrs. Valacort, whose utmost hopes of escape from the ‘ demon *ennui*’ had been limited to the first few days ; the unfeigned interest she felt in her husband’s family had satisfied her that those might be well enough got over ; and then, as Valacort must be backward and forward on account of parliamentary attendance, she should

get him to make some plausible excuse for wanting her home again, when her *sejour* became very unbearable ; so that when she found herself at the end of a third week before she was well aware that one was gone by, she did not cease to wonder how it could possibly be ! and was at length obliged to confess, that the modes of employing time which she had never yet taken into her account, might help it on as imperceptibly, and *almost* as satisfactorily, as high play and numerous engagements.

Indeed every individual by whom she was surrounded, made it their study to contribute in every way they could devise to her amusement ; even the bustling activity, counsels sage, and happy quotations of Katty, had their share in adding to the London lady's diversion. And a rubber at whist now occasionally found its place among the evening pastimes, though not, indeed, at the rate of French fives, "under which," Mrs. Vala-

cort had at first declared, "there could scarcely be sufficient interest excited to make it worth attending to."

Mrs. Villars had judiciously introduced the proposal as a gratification to her husband; well knowing that if put upon the true footing of seeking to amuse Mrs. Valacort, it would not have been listened to, but she good-humouredly enough acquiesced with a view to please him, provided any of them would sort her cards and deal for her; adding, however, somewhat contemptuously: "What stake? — half crowns? — shillings? — pins? — make no alteration in your country play on my account! — one will interest me just as much as the other!"

"Whist requires such good judgment," Mr. Villars answered, "that like chess, it might almost be played for love. We never deviate from our shillings, and a half crown bet to indulge gamblers," smiling, "but Belmont Park will afford you some

better sport bye and bye than our push-pin concern!"

This was a comfortable hearing; but again in this instance, Mrs. Valacort was surprized to find the effect of habit, in the rapidity with which she came to be as eager about her shillings and half-crowns, and as contentious for the mode of making or losing the odd trick, as she could have been in the Duchess of Castlehaven's boudoir.

Sophia was the first person in this happy circle to feel the serenity of her mind something impaired, by the dissimilarity she discovered in her own and Sir Edward Arundel's ideas of true friendship. In vain had she waited for a solution of the extraordinary effect produced upon him by the first sight of Patty. Too high spirited to seek a confidence he seemed disposed to withhold, she had brooded over his reserve, till a considerable degree of displeasure was engendered in her breast. "What! — was

friendship then with him but a name?—it could be no trivial circumstance that had called up the emotion she had beheld! but confidence must come unsolicited, or it was not worth having!”

The frequent recurrence of thoughts, such as these, had sometimes led her into an inequality of behaviour, so nearly bordering upon caprice, as might have alarmed Sir Edward, could he have seen any thing short of perfection in her; but wholly unconscious of what his countenance had betrayed, he had curbed his impatience for an interview with Patty, that he might not create observation. When, therefore, he found Sophia occasionally substituting dryness or reserve to her natural frankness of manner, he conceived the fault to be in some inadvertent omission on his part; arraigned his own conduct, and redoubled his assiduities—assiduities indeed, of the most captivating sort! unobtrusive, but incessant; ever watchful for what might please, without

apparent study ; for there was in Sir Edward Arundel an attraction — a *loveableness* (if I may use such a word) not easily described or resisted. No wonder Sophia's friendship should gradually engross more and more of her thoughts as these qualities unfolded themselves, and that she should become proportionably dissatisfied with what she could only attribute to reserve in him.

Mr. Valacort, ever interested in what pleased his wife, had, in fact, been blinded by his partiality for her, to the heartlessness of the scenes they had of late years been engaged in, and could not avoid, in the excursions he now had occasionally to make, being struck with the comparison of the solicitude testified by their late associates respecting her ; with that she excited at the Priory, which was actually contributing so materially to the restoration of her general health.

“ Dear Valacort ! how glad I am to see you ! ” exclaimed her grace of Castle-

haven, after having two or three times met him without recollecting the absence of his wife; “we are just wanting a fourth—do cut in, and tell us all about poor dear Mrs. Valacort’s leg; and when we shall get her amongst us again? I hear she broke it a second time, in refusing to be lifted out of the carriage.”

“Thank you for your kind sympathy, Duchess, her leg has never been broken at all.”

“Beg pardon!—her arm I meant—surely we had two by honours!” scoring them,—“made me not think of what I was saying—but you can’t imagine how grieved I have been, to think of her being sent into the dreary country at this time of the year.”

“My dear duchess, do you recollect this is June?”

“Is it?—Well, but we are in the very height of the winter amusements you know!—but Bailey is such a creature for

country air, he never allows for the counteracting influence of country *ennui* !”

“Faith ! it’s so long since we have led a country life in the country, that we are somewhat surprised to find it rather a good sort of thing.”

“That would be a surprise to me, indeed !” replied her Grace.

“But I believe Belmont Park is in that neighbourhood,” observed Mrs. Waller ; “and there may be some good whist got there to afford a little relief to the daily dulness ; for between ourselves, the Villars’s, though very respectable, and all that—are a little what we should call quizzical !—Lady Laura Belmont made me almost die with laughing, by taking them off t’other day.”

“She’s a charming creature, and a monstrous good mimic !” said the duchess : “by the way ! did you break in that pretty niece of yours to waltzing during her stay ? there never was any

thing so droll as her dismay, at my asking whether she were a waltzer?"

"Upon my soul, if I must speak the truth, I believe she has rather broke us in, to a little more rationality than we were acquainted with, before she came to us."

"Well, heaven bless you with your rationality!" was the reply, "dull work I trow! make the best on't!—but let's mind what we are about now!—four all! a critical moment!"

And there ended the tender concern for 'poor dear Mrs. Valacort.'

CHAP. V.

LORD Cranmore appeared earlier than usual one morning at the breakfast-table, with a cloud upon his brow, and entreated an interview with Emily in the library ; where he put into her hand a letter just received from his father.

With the expression of all the regret at the delay of his son's happiness that an ambitious politician could be expected to feel, the Marquis summoned him to town, to ' become the agent of a secret negociation on the continent, of the utmost importance, which might take up an indefinite time, though he hoped it

would not exceed a few weeks ; and was sure Lord Cranmore would find full compensation for the protraction of a private engagement, in the honour of being selected for an object of such public importance.'

Public spirit did not, however, happen to be just then the predominant feature of his lordship's mind, and grievously did he deplore the choice his father had with very able political manœuvring, caused to fall upon him. But there was no remedy ; and Emily with her accustomed good sense and disinterestedness urged every argument she could think of to reconcile him to the delay, although her evident emotion sufficiently proved her strong feeling of a separation so unlooked-for, as well as attended with the danger to which the troubles on the continent at that time exposed travellers.

"One consolation he might have in absence," he said, "if she thought her brother could be induced to accompany him to Vi-

enna ; he should then not feel so wholly separated." She had no doubt but Henry would meet the proposal with alacrity.

It should here be mentioned, that Henry Villars had only embraced the profession of the law in obedience to the wish of his parents, his own inclination being entirely for literature and scientific research ; he had, however, pursued the dry study with zeal and considerable credit ; till an occurrence which has not unfrequently staggered the very scrupulous, came across his career ; the necessity of accepting a retaining fee, in a cause of some notoriety, from the party he believed in his heart to be wrong. Finding himself thus compelled to the attempt ' to make the worse appear the better reason ;' and having moreover unluckily succeeded ; he took so unconquerable a dislike to the profession, that his father could not withhold his concurrence to his withdrawing from the bar. And this left him at liberty to com-

ply with Lord Cranmore's wish, which he did with all the pleasure his sister had anticipated.

With a heart somewhat lightened by the unequivocal testimony of her entire affection, the lover parted from the object of his most perfect adoration, and set forward with the speed his filial duty inspired.

Emily's spirits could not immediately recover from such a stroke ; Sophia found her greatly depressed—sunk indeed beyond what she herself could very well account for. A sort of superstitious dread seemed to take possession of her ; this, however, was so new in Emily, and so unreasonable, she would not give way to it ; and quickly agreed to endeavour to shake it off, by going into the air ; and Sophia, to direct her thoughts to other objects, proposed a botanical ramble, taking Agatha with them, who was a useful assistant upon such occasions, by

her activity in scrambling after specimens.

“O! see what a beauty here is!” cried the little girl, showing a flower she had just gathered.

“That is exactly the *campanula spatula* I have been in search of,” said her aunt; “but this is a poor specimen, Agg! see if you can’t find a better!”

“There were a great many better where I got that one I gave aunt Katty t’other day.”

“How came you to give it to aunt Katty? she don’t care about weeds, as she calls them.”

“No, but she saw me have it in my hand, and she said she would salt it for your herbal.”

“Salt it!—what could she mean?—she could’nt say so!”

“Yes, indeed, but she did; and she said cousin Ned had told her he had been helping you to salt yours.”

“Some play upon aunt Katty’s credulity,” said Emily; “but who is cousin Ned?”

Agatha looked at Sophia, and laughed.

“It’s a name she has thought proper to give to Sir Edward Arundel,” replied Sophia; “and he encourages her in it, and in every sort of liberty she chooses to take with him.”

“Yes—he says he likes me to call him so, because it makes him as if he belonged to the family; but doesn’t he belong to it though?—isn’t he my cousin in good earnest, aunty?”

“To be sure he is!—show us, Agg, where you found more of those campanulas!”

“O! it was up in the corner of that field, where you had such a fright you know.”

“Why, Agatha! you know I positively forbid Patty to take you through that field, on account of the vicious cow.”

“Well then, aunty, indeed Patty

couldn't help it—it was my own fault—I quite forgot you had forbid it!”

“But it was Patty's business to put you in mind of—”

“O, but Patty was not there, and she called me away as soon as she saw it—so pray don't be angry with her!”

“But I certainly must be angry, if she separates herself from you, when I rely entirely upon her—”

“Now, indeed, aunty,” again interrupting her, “it was only just for a little, while she was a talking to cousin Ned; and he bid me go on before, because he had something to say to Patty; and so they didn't mind me, and I kept running after butterflies, and quite forgot about the field.”

Sophia looked at her sister in amazement.

“I dare say he was making some kind inquiries into her situation,” said Emily; “you know we were all so much interested about her in town.”

“He made her cry very much,” resumed the little chatterer; “but I don’t believe he was cross though; for he looked so good-natured at her!”

“Emily! there is something very unaccountable to me in all this!” said Sophia, in a tone of great emotion.

Emily was surprised at her agitation, for she knew nothing of that first *rencontre* which had so dwelt upon her sister’s mind.

“Do these meetings often take place?” she asked precipitately, and wholly thrown off her guard. “I had a better opinion of Patty than—”

“My dear sister!” interrupted Emily, anxious to check what the child might repeat, though no ways displeased with this apparent perturbation; “the meeting must have been purely accidental!—I would answer for Patty’s principles and conduct upon any occasion.”

“Now dear aunty! pray don’t be angry

at Patty ! she is so good, and does love you so."

Sophia, conscious of her imprudence, replied, " I will not be angry at Patty, Agatha, if you have command enough of your tongue not to tell her what you have now betrayed to me."

" O that I have, I am sure!—You shall see now how I can keep a secret, for all cousin Ned didn't think I could neither—but I have though."

" What ! did he bid you keep secret his meetings with Patty ?" again exclaimed Sophia impetuously.

No, he never said nothing about that."

" But I thought, Agatha," said Sophia, again recovering herself, " that you had promised me never to let any body tell you a secret that was to be kept from me."

" So I did, aunty ; and I'm sure I never would let any body in the world tell

me one you mightn't know, except cousin Ned, because he wouldn't tell me to do wrong no more than you—but I shouldn't tell you a story for him neither—so now, don't you never ask me what I have done with that pretty purse you worked for me—that's all!"

Agatha's talent for secret-keeping called up something bordering on a smile in the saddened countenance of Emily, whilst it increased the conscious glow which had overspread that of Sophia. By tacit consent they turned to the objects of their search, though each found much food for silent cogitation in what had been so unintentionally betrayed.

A very few minutes had laid the heart of Sophia more open to her sister than it had hitherto been to herself; but the discovery was treasured up with secret complacency, unwilling to alarm her delicacy, by the premature detection of sentiments so congenial to the wishes of her family.

Sophia, on the contrary, was utterly dismayed to discover the nature of her own feelings — feelings ! from the bare suspicion of which, she would but a few months ago have recoiled with horror. Indeed it was with little less than self-
abhorrence, that she now became sensible she was in danger of a dereliction from the fidelity she considered equally due to Delmere, as if he were still in being. She no sooner, however, convinced herself of what she had to fear, than with her natural impetuous enthusiasm, she determined upon the step she would take.

In the evening, when she had disposed of Agatha to her bed, she sought another interview with her sister ; and immediately entered upon the subject of self-accusation, by recurring to the trifling circumstances the child had brought to light in their walk, “ which had fully opened her eyes,” she said, “ to the danger

into which she was voluntarily rushing."

"Danger of what?" Emily asked.

"Of incurring my own self-aborrence, as well as forfeiting the opinion of all those whose esteem is worth possessing."

"Good heavens! my dear Sophia!—and how?"

"Emily!—I felt a mean unworthy sensation of displeasure at that poor girl Patty, for being an object of concealed interest to Sir Edward Arundel."

"I have no doubt but one word from you to herself would obtain an elucidation that would entirely set your mind at rest."

"I should despise myself for taking an underhand mode of coming at what my friend sees fit to withhold."

"Then frankly apply to himself."

"And betray an interest beyond what friendship can sanction?"

"Do you think that discovery would be very distressing to him?"

“ It ought to sink me below his contempt !”

“ You do not mean, Sophia, that Sir Edward Arundel’s sentiments for you can be mistaken ?”

“ I mean, that had he not vowed to confine them to the limits of the purest friendship, he had never attained the footing of confidence we are now upon.”

“ But what should preclude his forming the hope that a more tender feeling might in time arise out of it on both sides ?”

“ My faith to the memory of Delmere,” answered Sophia solemnly, “ which I stand pledged to carry inviolate to the grave.”

“ Could Delmere exact so unreasonable a promise ?”

“ What might in any other have been unreasonable, could not be deemed so in him. We were each other’s first, and only love ; and if fate had robbed him of *me*, his affections had been buried with

me—he has sworn it a thousand and a thousand times.—How then could I ever forgive myself, were I to suffer mine to be drawn aside from him?”

“ I think, dearest Sophia, your enthusiastic mind is creating distresses for yourself and others. I never can believe that, had Delmere survived you, he would have condemned himself to a life of celibacy.”

Sophia was perfectly indignant at her sister's doubts of her husband's truth; acknowledged, that she was now made excessively unhappy, by detecting in herself a change towards Sir Edward highly injurious to her plighted faith, and said, she was firmly resolved upon breaking off all intercourse with him, as her only security.

“ But upon what plea?” Emily asked.

“ Upon the fair and candid one of having discovered that we are both becoming the victims of self-delusion.”

“ For pity's sake, consider well what

you are about, Sophia!—do consult with my mother before taking so rash a step!—do recollect the state this unhappy man was in when you became acquainted with him!—do not, from a principle of false delicacy, risk driving him now to perhaps worse—”

“False delicacy!” interrupting her, “and this from you, Emily!—but it is in vain to argue against prejudice. I must be guided by what I feel to be right, whatever misery be the consequence.”

“Dearest sister! will you at least promise me not to be so precipitate? do give more time to the consideration!—indeed you are not at present sufficiently dispassionate to give the argument its due weight!—there is a bias of displeasure in your mind on account of Patty. Will you at least let him explain that matter to you before you take any decisive step?”

With much difficulty and length of persuasion, this concession was finally

obtained; and Emily rested satisfied in the hope the explanation would draw on others, that might reconcile Sophia to herself: for her opinion of Delmere differed widely from that of her sister, and she had little doubt of Sir Edward's being acquainted with circumstances calculated to set the matter in a far other light.

To move Sophia from her determinations was not of easy accomplishment at any time, and she remained firmly bent upon her purpose; but she had conceded to seeking the explanation, more with a view to reinstating Patty in her own good opinion, than from any consideration respecting Sir Edward. So she believed at least; for the innocent simplicity and integrity of the good girl had created a strong interest for her with her mistress, who had really been pained on *her* account with the doubtful aspect of the business, as well as from the other motives that had not so clearly manifested

themselves till brought to light by Agatha.

It was not long ere the opportunity offered of entering upon the subject with Sir Edward ; but a slight circumstance preceded it, which somewhat disqualified Sophia from treating the discussion with all the moderation she intended.

She had inquired for Patty with a view to sending Agatha out of the way with her, and was informed she was not within ; upon which she took Agatha to a bower in the garden, meaning to set her about a little gardening task that should detain her long enough to give time for the explanation she sought. As they approached the bower, Patty appeared at a distance, coming along the path from the village ; but she turned out of it through a gap in the hedge to get by a back way into the house, looking anxiously round as if fearful of being seen ; and soon after, Sir Edward followed from the village also.

Thrown entirely off her guard by this suspicious occurrence, she hastily dismissed Agatha to the house, and going into the bower, awaited his approach with all the composure she could assume; but assuredly the expression of her countenance betrayed 'all was not well within.'

Sir Edward came up with the animated look of pleasure the sight of her always produced in him, and began expressing his satisfaction—but stopped short on observing her cold manner, and with a look of alarm, said, "Something disturbs you!"

"I cannot deny but something does indeed," was the reply.

He waited to hear more; but finding her continue silent, he resumed, "May I not know?—will you not impart to me what has occurred?"

"Your conscience, Sir Edward, could save me that trouble, I presume."

"Have *I* incurred your displeasure?"

astonished: "it has been most unintentionally, I can aver!"

"Unintentional that it should have come to my knowledge, no doubt; but it is not in my nature to bear with concealments."

"Nor in mine to have any with you, assuredly."

"Then what am I to think of your withholding a secret so important as to blanch your cheek at one moment? and at another, to induce you to seek private interviews—but," interrupting herself, "I do not mean to urge a disclosure you do not see fit to make; only you must not be surprised that under circumstances so equivocal, I deem Patty an improper person to continue in charge of Agatha."

"Be assured, Mrs. Delmere, it will be the pride of my life to lay every thought of my heart open to you; but this secret is not my own; deeply grieved indeed

should I however be, to injure in any shape this interesting girl, whose innocence and integrity are as unquestionable, as —”

Sophia impetuously interrupted him, “Over a secret that is not your own, friendship certainly has no claim; but allow me to observe, that the warmth and zeal with which you take up the cause are not very favourable to it.”

“Surely you cannot doubt the purity of my motive, in vindicating Patty—”

“*Your* motive! Sir Edward—good heaven! do not imagine!—do not ascribe the desire to investigate her conduct to any anxiety respecting *your* motive!—I should despise myself if—that is, you cannot but be sensible of the importance to Agatha. — *Your* motive!—gracious heaven!—”

Conscious her confusion was betraying her, her agitation became so uncontrollable, that she burst into a passion of tears.

Astonished, confounded, yet gratified almost beyond the power of concealment, to detect the working of feelings so much more consonant to his wishes than he had yet dared to flatter himself with having inspired, he fell at her feet in the most extreme emotion. “Dearest!—most beloved of—*friends!*” checking himself from the instantaneous recollection of the consequences to be expected from making her sensible of what she was betraying; “how eagerly would I shed my blood to save a tear of yours from falling! but here—’tis the severe dictates of honour that seal my lips. Heaven only knows how severe! but credit my word, which never yet gave sanction to deceit, Patty is pure as innocence; and of principle so strict, that none better could be selected for the trust reposed in her.”

His passionate action had, however, flashed the conviction upon the mind of Sophia, that she had betrayed herself; and nearly phrenzied with the thought,

she clasped her hands in wild agony, exclaiming, "Enough, Sir Edward! enough!—Spirit of my departed Delmere! forgive!—oh forgive! I will redeem this moment of degradation!—I here renew my vow of inviolable faith!" Rising to go, she added with recovered dignity, "Follow me not, Sir Edward!—I fully absolve Patty, on the strength of your assertion. *And here we part.*"

So saying, she left him, as he bowed submissive to her will; but little aware of her full meaning in the words she had last uttered.

Severe indeed! beyond any thing she could suppose, was this trial of his fortitude. One little word would have dispelled the delusion under which Sophia acted, and secured him that, for which alone he wished to live; but the sacredness of confidential friendship, though the grave had now closed upon it, could not consistently with his principles of honour and delicacy be set aside. It was

no slight consolation, however, that he derived from the conviction that he was beloved—and what might he not now hope from time!—

Meanwhile the self-condemned Sophia had separated from him in no enviable state of mind. Shocked beyond measure at the mean jealousy she was conscious of having betrayed, instead of the candid dignified step she had proposed to herself to take;—lowered as she conceived in the eyes of him whose esteem she prized above all earthly blessings, and degraded in her own, by the discovery of having deviated so much farther from her plighted faith, than she could have suspected herself capable of;—she formed the instantaneous resolution of following up her parting words by the positive interdiction of all farther intercourse, and a recurrence to the compact that had sealed their friendship.

CHAP. VI.

SIR Edward Arundel's agitated ruminations had led him to wander away for a considerable length of time, when he was finally met by Katty.

“Bless us all, Sir Edward !” she began, “where can you have been straying? I’ve been hunting for you all the world over ! here’s a letter for you slipped by mistake among my brother’s—I thought myself sure of finding you at the cottage—but they told me you had been gone ever so long ; and there was my poor niece with eyes so red—and cheeks so pale—I hope to goodness *you* are not going to leave us too !”

“ My dear Mrs. Katharine ! what a flattering suggestion ! ” was the delighted reply, quite thrown off his guard by the unexpected coincidence with the train of his own thoughts.

“ Suggestion ? dear heart ! I didn’t intend to suggest any thing. I vow and protest I have no more meaning in any thing I say, than the child unborn ; for I wanted to talk to you about something quite different ; only do but conceive what a scrape you have got me into ! ”

“ Have I indeed ? then pray command my best exertions to help you out of it — what is it ? ”

“ You told me, you know, about my niece Delmere’s salting her plants. ”

“ Not that I can recollect, upon my word ! ”

“ But you certainly did though ! — aye, and I see by your smile you are conscious of it too. ” He smiled at the recollection of having said he had assisted in *sorting* the specimens for Sophia’s herbal.

“ Well ! so when little Agg brought in a weed of some sort or other, which she said her aunt wanted ; I bid her give it me, wishing to surprise my niece agreeably with it ready salted to her hand, and I laid it as straight and as even as ever I could—and sprinkled it well all over, and popped it in between Malthus’s Popularity and Darwin’s—something, I forget what—upon my brother’s library table ; nice heavy books, to flatten it, you know, as I’ve seen her do—and what do you think ? only conceive my fright, when I saw something wet this morning all over the table ! and if you’ll believe me, there were the books all in such a pickle ! stained in such a shocking manner ! leaves and binding !—and the weed looking all rotten as it were. I declare you might have knocked me down with a feather—my brother will be in such a taking ! ”—

Sir Edward could not altogether command his countenance during this speech, but seeing her look somewhat offended at

the levity with which he seemed to be treating her distress, he quickly recovered his gravity, and told her, “ The accident fell out so luckily for him, he could not help enjoying the mistake, as he had long been intending to read both the books, and might have gone on neglecting to get them ; but if she would purloin them from Mr. Villars’s table, they should be immediately replaced by those he meant to order, and would not read at all the worse for their stains.”

“ Good gracious me ! that is so very good-natured, and so very like yourself Sir Edward Arundel, and I can’t possibly have any scruple about being obliged to *you*, who may so soon, for any thing I know, be —— but mum for that ! only I must just say that from the very first hour of our acquaintance, sir, you have had my very best wishes for success—that’s all.”

And for that *all* Sir Edward was ready to hug her to his heart ; so they separated

in great mutual kindness ; and poor Katty was relieved from the dread of her brother's displeasure, which was apt to run high where books were concerned.

Sir Edward held the letter un-opened in his hand ; it was from Rock Castle, and could not, he thought, be of much moment. His mind was wholly intent on Katty's suggestions ; and he was tempted to doubt whether he had hitherto been quite fair, in his appreciation of her mental powers. Assuredly she seemed in this instance to have had penetration to discover his sentiments before he had even detected them in himself, for she said, ' From the first she had wished him success.' Kind soul !—and honest !—there certainly was sometimes an acuteness upon particular subjects in women who did not in general seem bright, that was surprising ! the same quickness of perception might have laid open Mrs. Delmere's feelings to her likewise—rapturous thought !—

It is amusing and not unuseful to remark how susceptible the judgment is, even of the wise ones of the earth, of receiving a bias from what flatters their wish. Good Katty—bless her! had gone no deeper into the real state of the case on this occasion, than on most others that fell within her cognisance; she harboured a notion—for it would be a strange abuse of terms to apply the word opinion to any of her crude conceptions—but she harboured a *notion* that a disengaged man could not be thrown in the way of a disengaged woman, without an engagement between them becoming the necessary result; and Sir Edward Arundel proving besides both rich and agreeable, her fervent wishes had converted the matter with regard to them into absolute certainty, long before either of the parties concerned was in the smallest degree conscious of receding from the mutual reluctance with which they had first met; for assuredly there could not well be a

more unpromising illustration of Katty's hypothesis than they originally offered. Sir Edward now, however, went on, revolving the various innuendos that had at times dropt from her, till he satisfied himself that she actually was a person of considerable observation, and entitled to have her friendship cultivated from better feelings than those she had thus far excited.

Whether he very fairly investigated the motives that prompted his seeking this greater intimacy is not quite so certain, as it is, that the happiest forebodings and anticipations had acquired full possession of his mind, when he finally recollected to open his letter.

Its contents were of deeper interest than he had foreseen ; it informed him of his uncle's being dangerously ill, in the West of England, and urged him to lose no time in going to him. This admitted not of a moment's hesitation. His tie indeed to Mr. Arundel was simply that, of consan-

guinity ; no similarity of character or disposition endeared them to each other ; no sympathy existed between them ; but Mr. Arundel was at a distance from home, surrounded only by menials, and Sir Edward knew of what importance different care might be. He ordered his chaise, therefore, without delay ; and stopping only to inform Sophia by a note, of the cause of his sudden departure, he set forth with feelings sadly checked from their late elation by this vexatious event.

Meanwhile, Sophia was employing herself in writing and destroying letter after letter, before she could at all feel satisfied with the expression of her sentiments. Having at length, however, accomplished the difficult task, she dispatched it to Boxmount Cottage, without any previous reference to Emily, whose opposition she was desirous to escape ; and then shutting herself up in her room, forbad all intrusion of letters or messages whatever ;

and gave herself up to the most unqualified misery. By these means she remained ignorant till the following day of Sir Edward's departure.

Mr. Arundel had been very ill, but his disorder was already on the turn when his nephew arrived, and promised such rapid recovery, as to give Sir Edward every reason to hope he should not be long detained from pursuing his heart's dearest interests—and he was again giving a loose to those flattering anticipations that had so recently brightened his prospect, when the sight of Mrs. Delmere's handwriting on the superscription of a letter blessed his eyes! addressed to himself!—could it be?—He kissed the fair characters in a transport of exultation—and read as follows:

‘Mortified — humbled — sunk in my own eyes beyond all endurance—I call upon you, Sir Edward, to recollect the terms of our friendly compact—and leave me.

‘ I look impatiently to the only atonement I can make for feelings so unworthy of all I have ever professed to be. Absence—a long continued uninterrupted absence, may restore me to some portion of the self-esteem I have forfeited.

‘ I attempt not to dissemble or disguise the sentiments that have betrayed themselves—and oh! how degradingly! You saw the workings of mean jealousy, and with the delicacy peculiar to yourself, would have saved me from discovering that you did so; but I could not be deceived—I have lost even the poor merit of dignified sincerity, with which I had predetermined to have come forward and candidly said—
‘ My friend, ’tis time we part’ (for I had detected a sufficient change in myself to convince me there was cause to do so, though far from conscious how much cause!) I had then at least, by such consistent frankness, saved myself from being lowered in your esteem: but now!—
You who know what I owe to the memory

of him that is gone!—You to whom I have acknowledged the reciprocal inviolable vow that binds us!—for never was faith like his to me, his earliest only love! what must you deem of me! oh, not half so despicably as I do of myself!

‘ But enough of this disgraceful weakness, which I have not sought to palliate, that you might clearly see my simple openheartedness, and derive this conviction from it, that I speak with the same spirit of sincerity, in declaring my unalterable resolution of breaking off all intercourse.

‘ I feel the wound I am inflicting—and it is not the least trying part of the step I now take; but where honour compels there can be no appeal! Neither can I allow you to make any to my family; *their* interference could be of no avail; none can judge of the peculiar situation in which I am placed but myself—and *you*; Sir Edward, who must be conscious from your knowledge (earlier even than mine)

of the purity and truth of him whose remembrance I cherish ; you well understand the obligation laid upon me by the affections of a heart which loved me entirely, and never knew love but for me. Your long-tried generous friendship for him will best reconcile you to the sacrifice we are now called upon to make ; it must be perfect as his deserts. Here then ceases all correspondence between us. Whatever may relate to Agatha, may pass through the channel of my brother ; I could not bear that my inconsiderate folly should rob the dear child of the invaluable benefit of your advice, and protection.

‘ In mitigation of the pain this letter will give you, I beg you to reflect upon the very high opinion that could alone prompt the courage to write it. Your esteem is absolutely necessary to the recovery of my peace of mind ; and your *entire acquiescence* in the contents of this, I shall consider as the *proof* of my not

having wholly forfeited it. I can admit of no answer.

‘ Farewell !—a long farewell !—my far too highly valued friend !

‘ SOPHIA DELMERE.’

Sir Edward remained for hours as one petrified, holding the fatal letter in his hand, that so irrevocably crushed the fondly cherished hopes so lately sprung up in his soul ; for too well did he know Sophia, to look for any mitigation of the sentence here passed.—His misery rendered still more poignant by the cruel appeal to his own conviction of what he knew to be a delusion, which he could not allow himself to dispel.

Dreadfully severe was now the conflict, as on the repeated perusals of this trying letter, he for a moment hugged the delightful certainty of being beloved to his breast ; his whole mind softened by the consciousness that one word !—one little word ! might make her his ! and what could now be the injury to him who

was gone?—but all his better feelings as instantly recurred to check this train of thought, and plunge him back into hopeless despondency.

To this most flagrant of Colonel Delmere's immoralities, the seduction of Patty's mother, Sir Edward had only become privy from accidental circumstances, and he had ineffectually exerted all the influence of friendship to avert the evil; a friendship not founded on similarity of principle assuredly, but fostered by gratitude, for Delmere's having exposed himself to imminent hazard to save Sir Edward's life, upon some military occasion. Delmere was esteemed as an officer, and honourable in all transactions with men; and Sir Edward devoted to the duties of his profession whilst in the army, and wholly free from libertine pursuits himself, was not acquainted with the whole extent of his friend's lax principles, or it might have slackened their friendly intercourse, and weakened the tie he

held so sacred ; for to that sacredness his mind ever again forcibly reverted, and the most unqualified wretchedness by degrees took possession of him.

Day after day passed on, ere he could bring his thoughts into any settled state. Finally, however, there seemed no alternative from implicit submission to her will ; and the Peninsula once more offered the best resource. He might there find a termination of his sufferings, that should still enhance the esteem of Sophia, and endear his memory—or he might—for there was an occasional buoyancy in his mind, excited by the assurance of her affection—he might find an opportunity there, of so distinguishing himself as to give him an irresistible hold upon her enthusiastic admiration of heroism.

Mr. Arundel's recovery soon set him at liberty to follow this plan, and he restrained himself to the addressing a valedictory letter to Mrs. Villars, in which he requested her to impart his determination

to Mrs. Delmere, 'trusting,' he said, 'that she would accept of his implicit obedience as the most convincing proof that his existence was devoted to her will.'

And in a very few days more, he was on his way to volunteer his services to Lord W——.

The surprise and regret with which Mrs. Villars received Sir Edward's letter, may readily be imagined; for to Emily alone had Sophia acknowledged what she had done, and under an injunction of such strict secrecy, that poor Emily could only grieve at what was not to be remedied. Nor did the account which Sophia candidly gave her mother, when called upon to explain, in any degree soften the vexation. Cut to the heart at this closing of so fair a prospect, Mrs. Villars endeavoured, at the risk of wounding her feelings, to convince her of the delusion under which she was throwing from her every chance of future comfort; but having only to adduce the general opi-

nion of the world respecting Colonel Delmere's moral character, she could specify no particulars; and for the world's opinion Sophia had very little respect; so nothing was gained by the argument.

The anxiety of Mrs. Villars was still increased by the step Sir Edward had taken; indeed, *there* her daughter was obliged to confess he had somewhat outstript her intentions; highly as she prized valour, she was not without 'compunctious visitings,' for having driven him once more into the field of danger, who had in earlier youth acquired sufficient renown in Egypt to satisfy even her heroic expectations: and however she strove to convince herself that his implicit obedience to her dictates was exactly what she looked for; and however she extolled it to her sister; such a restless disquietude now took possession of her, as entirely threw her out of all her habitual occupations. Agatha's instruction became an irksome task; her

impatience for the arrival of Mrs. Fitzclare exceeded all bounds ; the most unreasonable irritability betrayed itself upon this, and every occasion ; she could scarcely allow for the validity of the poor woman's plea for again deferring her departure, which was the critical state of Mrs. Carstairs ; whose last alarming seizure continued of such doubtful issue, that she could not be left till there was a change in one way or other.

How differently did the days now pass at the Priory, from those so lately marked by the brightest expectations !

Mrs. Valacort had left it in displeasure, little short of a downright quarrel, with Sophia ; it was not to be expected that she, who could not enter into the 'fastidiousness' of Emily, should make allowance for these loftier flights ; and she had so far influenced the sentiments both of Mr. and Mrs. Villars, that they wore an appearance of dryness very new from parents hitherto so indulgent ; which,

however, far from producing the intended effect of bringing their daughter to recal her unadvised mandate, only operated to make her confine herself more to her cottage, where solitude did not much contribute either to soften or moderate her feelings.

Miss Maxwell protracted her stay in the hope her friendly offices might be of use; but in vain did she exert her enlivening powers to restore any thing like cheerfulness to the family circle; the gloom even reached aunt Katty's vacant mind, of late so satisfactorily filled with plans of bridal paraphernalia, that now she seemed not to have an idea left, and was ready to fight with the wind, for want of an object on which to bestow her activity; and but for an occasional sprightly frisk of Agatha's, this little circle might have been mistaken for a Quakers' meeting where the spirit withheld its influence.

CHAP. VII.

WEEKS—months passed on in slow and cheerless succession; varied by little more of interest or incident, than what arose from the daily arrival of newspapers of every description, which Sophia now eagerly accumulated, in compensation of the epistolary intercourse she had so rashly prohibited. A glimpse of the postman as he first entered the grounds might be caught from her dressing-room window, and the breakfast table was ordered to be placed before it—his steps were followed in imagination, till he again emerged from behind the hawthorn hedge, and wond'rous dilatory they most commonly seemed! The

day passed in reading and comparing the military dispatches, reports, statements, conjectures ; the evening, in seeking her father's opinion of the probable results ; who unfortunately had not the same turn for military operations, as for political economy, so that no great increase of satisfaction was obtained by the discussion. Thus, however, did the six days go round, till *blank Monday* again brought an accession of ten-fold gloom.

Vain were Emily's gentle soothings to calm the perturbation of her sister's mind ; relieving her of the task of Agatha's lessons was all that could be done, until the arrival of Mrs. Fitzclare might assist in giving a turn to it ; but this continued to be retarded by Mrs. Carstairs' fluctuating state.

Poor Emily !—she too experienced the sickening influence of 'hope deferred.'

Lord Cranmore's letters breathed all that the tenderest purest affection could inspire ; but the unforeseen delays in

diplomatic negociation, still kept him hanging on, and of course unhappy.

An event at length occurred which worked a very unexpected change in the face of affairs.

Mary Benson, Patty's mother, had come to light. Miss Maxwell received the news from Lady Sarah. The poor woman had been absent from her cottage when it took fire; on her return she found it in ashes, and could obtain no intelligence of her daughter, farther than her having been seen by the neighbours, after the flames had burst out; she had sought her in the first instance at Lady Sarah Maxwell's, and thence been sent in various directions by one and another, who had had a glimpse of Patty, till she had at length wandered away many miles from home, and sunk down by the road-side overpowered with fatigue and distress of mind. Here she had been found by a humane cottager, who had taken her in and nursed her, for she had become very ill,

and continued so a considerable time. On recovering some degree of strength, she knew not what better to turn herself to, than taking a share in the daily labours of those who had rescued her, and carry her earnings to the common stock. As she was one day picking stones in a field, a farmer from her own neighbourhood chanced to pass, and recognize her. He asked whether Patty were again gone? and upon her answering she had never seen Patty since; he informed her of the advertisement he had read in the newspaper, with so little caution, that the sudden revulsion occasioned a relapse, and again disabled her for a time from setting out in quest of her daughter. The moment she was sufficiently recovered, she made the best of her way to Lady Sarah's, where she was informed of every particular; ending with the satisfactory assurance of her child's being now in perfect comfort and safety under

the protection of the widow of a Colonel Delmere.

Mary started at the name—then clasping her hands, she wildly exclaimed, “O! it’s the hand of providence!—it’s the hand of providence alone could have guided her there!”

This was so emphatically repeated, as to excite the curiosity of Lady Sarah, who, by dint of persuasive kindness, at length obtained from the unfortunate woman the secret of her life, in the acknowledgment of her youthful error. Her father was one of that class of men now nearly extinct in the country—a respectable English yeoman. Upon his discovering where Colonel Delmere had placed her, he had forcibly taken her away in his absence, and carried her to a distant country, where he had caused her to change her name; but where, after the birth of her child, the sense of her dishonour had broken his heart. This

stroke had completed the misery which her consciousness of misconduct had before made sufficiently acute, for by no common arts could she have been led astray ; and, as Patty had intimated, she had voluntarily devoted her days to hard labour and penitence, and her morning and evening prayer had been, that her poor girl might escape the snares of designing men.

She ended her narrative with expressing the hopes she had entertained, before the occurrence of this last misfortune, that a very deserving young man was about to make Patty his wife.

When Lady Sarah informed her there was too much reason to doubt his having such honest intentions, the poor creature fell upon her knees, exclaiming, “O blessed ! blessed be God then, again and again ! for having saved her and thrown her into such protection !—O my lady ! use your interest with Mrs. Delmere, never to lose sight of her !—She is her husband’s own child !—indeed she is !—

you see I have been no better able to judge for her than for myself.—Let her but be kept good and virtuous ! though I should never again set eyes on her, I shall bless God for evermore !”

Lady Sarah answered for the protection that would be given her ; and cautioning the mother against any unguardedness in betraying her daughter’s residence to George, should he artfully attempt the discovery, she gave her hopes of being allowed to see her—and immediately proceeded to make the communication to Miss Maxwell, who, without a moment’s delay imparted it to Emily.

The hand of providence did, indeed, seem extended to more than one object in this interesting disclosure, Emily thought ; but far more diffident of her own judgment, though with far more reason to confide in it, than Sophia, she immediately resorted to her mother with the letter.

Mrs. Villars, thus armed with what she

considered as incontrovertible facts, proceeded to the cottage with a feeling of happiness which had for some time past been a stranger to her bosom.

The news of Patty's mother being found, caused a momentary gleam of pleasure to play over the languid countenance of Sophia; but as the subsequent communication was made, the unwonted expression disappeared, and she declared her entire disbelief of the whole tale; and accused the woman of inventing it in consequence of having by some chance heard of the casual resemblance in Patty to Agatha.

"You Sophia! suspicious and uncharitable in the same breath! how unlike yourself!" cried Mrs. Villars.

"Every attempt to stigmatise Delmere will find me inaccessible—"

"To proof?" interrupted Mrs. Villars.

"Where is the proof? this is bare assertion."

"I conceive some proof may be ad-

duced from Lady Sarah Maxwell's opinion of the woman, whose good conduct she has known for years. I conceive an addition to it, to arise from the world's estimation of Colonel Delmere's character, so very wide of the purity you attribute to him ; above all, I conceive the unaccounted-for interest in Patty, betrayed by Sir Edward Arundel—”

“ Gracious heaven ! my mother ! ” interrupted Sophia, a ray of light now seeming to dart at once upon her heart, “ Gracious heaven ! could it be possible that—let us send for Patty !—but no—it shall not be from her that I will learn any thing—I will not forfeit his reliance on my generosity to her !—let us send for the mother—I will examine *her*. But Patty herself !—for mercy's sake ! can Patty be capable of so much duplicity ? ”

“ She may be ignorant, Sophia—it is very probable she is ; of that we shall know more ere long ; for the present, I must desire Emily to break to her the

news of her mother's being found, and Miss Maxwell will write, to request of Lady Sarah to send down Mary Benson, without loss of time."

The disturbance and distraction of Sophia's mind now rose to such a height, it was quite impossible she could subdue herself so as at this moment to bear the sight of Patty, whose joy, however extreme, brought on no alarming paroxysm; indeed, the gentle gradual course Emily had taken in making the discovery to her, was quite calculated to avert any such fear. She expressed the utmost eagerness to be immediately allowed to go to her mother; and when she had the additional happiness of hearing that her mother had been sent for to come to her, the excess of her gratitude for such an indulgence, made it very difficult to restrain her from rushing into her lady's presence—she scarce could be made to hear reason.

Having, however, at length been led

to comprehend that it was on Sophia's account she was prohibited, who having received some agitating news must not be disturbed, she gave way ; and the following morning Mrs. Villars contrived a pleasurable excursion for the day, for Agatha and Patty ; and when they returned to the cottage in the evening, Sophia was at the Priory.

The next morning brought poor Mary Benson to the arms of her daughter.

Sufficient time having been given for their mutual feelings to be somewhat tranquilized, and indeed for Sophia herself to obtain some degree of composure for the agitating interview, Mary, Benson was admitted into her presence.

The poor woman, pale—breathless—trembling—wholly unable to articulate a syllable, threw herself at her feet, and burst into an agony of tears ; her tears were of gratitude, but the sense of her own degradation sunk her to the earth.

There is a character in truth, not easily

mistaken!—the appearance of the woman instantly dispersed Sophia's doubts, but she could not soon command herself so as to speak.

Raising her however, and motioning for her to sit down, she would have said something encouraging, but the poor conscious woman drawing back, cried, “Oh no, madam!—oh no!—not before *you* can I sit!—too well do I know my own unworthiness! but my poor child is innocent and good, if you will but be pleased to continue your protection to her!”

Sophia now, with an effort, found voice to assure her she would; and by degrees recovered composure sufficient to inquire into the disgraceful truth.

Mary, whose object was now to make perfectly clear that, which she had devoted herself to a life of drudgery to conceal, gave an account at once so artless and so distinct of every circumstance, that it was impossible to withhold

belief from any thing she related ; and the unwarrantable and cruel means of seduction that had been employed, evinced a depravity in such strong contrast with the opinion of her idol which Sophia had thus far been deluded into cherishing, that it seemed almost to unsettle her understanding ; and when, in corroboration of her statements, Mary produced a packet of letters in Delmere's own handwriting, she exclaimed, " Enough!—enough!—for pity's sake have done—or you will drive me mad—"

Mary stood aghast—and lost all power of motion, as well as of articulation, in the dread of having offended.

Sophia perceiving her to stand as if petrified, recovered sufficient composure to say, " Be assured I will provide for you both—but go to your daughter ; you have dreadfully disordered me !"

" Pray, madam, forgive me !" again falling on her knees ; " for mercy's sake forgive me !—it was my child's eternal

welfare only, could have given me courage to utter it—”

“ I do forgive you !—I am not angry—only leave me now !” cried Sophia.

Mary arose to go ; as she was leaving the room, Sophia stopping her, eagerly said, “ Tell me, upon your veracity, what does your daughter know of what you have now told me ?”

“ Nothing, madam !—nothing, upon my sacred word ! not for worlds would I have let her know her mother’s disgrace.”

“ Then, on your life, say not a word to Patty of what you have now told me !”

“ Depend upon me, madam, for telling her nothing without your leave.” And Mary quitted the room, leaving Sophia in a state of perturbation not quickly to be tranquilized.

To discover in the man, whose immaculate purity had been the day dream of her romantic fancy, a systematic proflig-

gate! to have been the dupe of his hypocritical morality! to have been 'fooled by him to the top of her bent,' with the idea of being his first and only love! her pride and her delicacy were equally offended. Then the contrast rushed into her mind, of Sir Edward Arundel's inflexible integrity! conscious as she had become, of her entire power over him, what words can express her sense of the strict honour that could keep him silent when one word might have secured her his! and now to reflect that her obstinate adherence to her own single opinion in defiance of the world, should have caused her to sacrifice both his happiness and her own!—that her precipitate folly should have driven him into scenes of danger, from which he might not, with credit, be able to withdraw!—all this together, actually worked her uncontrollable imagination into a high fever; and many days elapsed before the joint efforts of Mrs. Villars and

Emily could restore her to any power of thought or action.

As she by degrees became more composed, it required no great strength of argument on her mother's part, to satisfy her that the sacredness of her vow rested upon its reciprocity—she never had considered it in any other light she no longer reproached herself, for her just estimation of Sir Edward Arundel's merit, and gave up her whole heart and mind to the contemplation of it; but how wretched did she now feel, in the dread that the disappointment which had impelled him to volunteer his services, might also cause him to expose himself more rashly to danger, than the occasion called for.

She, however, hesitated to take the step her natural frankness would have prompted, till an account in the newspapers of an intended attack of more than common hazard, left but one idea in her mind; that of endeavouring to

draw Sir Edward from the danger, by a fair exposure of the change in her sentiments, which had resulted from the discovery she had made—and her letter she hoped might reach in time by the aid-de-camp who had brought the dispatches, and was immediately to return.

With her habitual impetuosity she seized her pen—but widely different was the present task from any of the foregoing! She began over and over again—she could not satisfy herself. Delicacy—true feminine delicacy now stood in the way of frankness. On the former occasions—in the case of Lord Leonard Ormsby it was generosity—in the case of Sir Edward it had been integrity, that urged her on to such uncommon proceedings; but here!—to invite a lover back!—she could not do it—and she disdained to have recourse to subterfuge of any kind!—throwing down her pen in an agony, she resorted to her mother.

Highly gratified with the task, Mrs.

Villars found no difficulty in making the fair statement.

The discovery of Mary Benson had placed the forbearance of Sir Edward in so strong a light had so changed Mrs. Delmere's opinion of her husband's claims upon her sentiments—and so deepened her regret at the dangers to which her precipitancy had exposed him, that she looked anxiously for the speedy and safe return which might afford her the means of atoning for the inconsistency and caprice of her former treatment.

And this letter reached its destination on the very eve of the battle.

Meanwhile, the sight of Patty was so very agitating to Sophia, that Mrs. Villars proposed the sending her with her mother into a respectable lodging at Andover, where they might at leisure look round for a situation that would suit them—they were sufficiently qualified to carry on some little haberdashery business—and the Villars family all con-

curred in the wish of contributing to supply the means.

Mary Benson's good opinion of George, had not entirely given way to Lady Sarah Maxwell's reprobation of him, as that was only founded on suspicion ; for Patty had always held back from specifying his misconduct. Now therefore, she could not resist expressing a hope that he might be able to justify himself. "Never!—never, mother!" exclaimed the agitated girl: "You shall be the judge yourself; I never could have revealed his baseness to any other."

The narrative may be given in fewer words than poor Patty employed in it, whose sufferings were too painfully recalled to her mind to proceed very coherently.

As she was returning at rather a late hour, from a farm whither her mother had sent her, she met George in a bye lane—she was immediately sensible from his manner, that he was flushed with

liquor ; and upon his offering her some rudeness, she had mildly expostulated with him, hoping by gentleness to calm him ; but his conversation becoming more improper, she asked him, how he could think of wounding the ears of one he meant to make his wife, with such shocking talk—upon which, he burst into a violent laugh, and told her, marriage was a very good thing to talk about ; but they might set him down a fool, who caught him in that noose ; and his behaviour became so brutal, that fright gave her strength to push him from her, and by his reeling and staggering back she had escaped past him, and ran on faster than in his present condition he could follow. On reaching the cottage, and not finding her mother below, she had lighted her candle, supposing her in bed, and gone up stairs to seek her protection—not finding her there, however, fear again took possession of her, at the thoughts of being alone if George had followed, and

in her terror she left the candle ; making her way out at the back of the cottage to a neighbour's hovel close by—here she waited till a cry of fire alarmed her, and then rushing forth with the other cottagers, she saw the flames breaking forth from her own dwelling, and losing all recollection in the various horrors that now assailed her, she took the fancy that she had burnt her mother in her bed ; and flew off she knew not whither. Having wandered about the remainder of the night without knowing where she was, she had at length from lassitude sunk down under a hedge in a field, and remained in a state of stupefaction for some hours. Upon recovering the power of motion, she again set forth, and found herself in Hyde Park, just when the crowd was at its height. Seeing so many people together, the idea struck her bewildered mind, that George might be amongst them—and she plunged into the water to escape him.

When Patty had concluded her recital, her mother hugged her to her heart, for her virtuous determination against ever again holding intercourse with the worthless fellow.

Patty now also informed her mother of Sir Edward Arundel's interest in her fate, and repeated inquiries after various circumstances, of which she had not been able to give him any account; he had assured her, that whenever her mother should be found, he would provide for her future comforts. Mary Benson could not understand what should lead a perfect stranger to show any concern about her, for she had never known of his ineffectual efforts to rescue her from Delmere's pursuit—any more than of the provision he had finally obtained of him, to make for her and her infant, whenever he might be able to discover them; to which Sir Edward, however, had not been able to obtain any clue till the unexpected appearance of Patty at the cottage, when

the coincidence of her likeness and her age had so forcibly struck him. Mary, rendered suspicious by unhappy experience, carefully questioned her daughter respecting the stranger's manner to her, but received perfect satisfaction as to the delicacy and propriety with which he had treated her.

An eligible situation for the mother and daughter soon offered ; the good-will of a small haberdashery and stationary shop was purchased for them by Mr. Villars ; and they found themselves comfortably settled in the way of getting a decent and creditable livelihood. They retained the name of Benson ; and the Villars' family concurred in the propriety of Sophia's wish, to keep Patty ignorant of her origin.

CHAP. VIII.

THE protracted absence of Lord Cranmore on the continent, and of Lord Leonard Ormsby in Ireland, had given full scope to Lady Sabina's misconduct.

She had indeed so completely braved the opinion of the world, as to have finally drawn the attention of her father to her proceedings; vain had been the attempts Lady Kingsborough had made to check her daughter's unguardedness; one decided advantage Lady Sabina had promised herself as the certain result of matrimony—that it would set her free from parental control; and as it rested

with herself to ensure this consequence, she was safe here at least from disappointment.

The Marquis finding her wholly callous to his representations also, called for the interference of his son-in-law; but Lord Belmont treated the matter very lightly; and could not be persuaded there was any thing more in it than that persevering love of admiration in his wife, which had always been encouraged by her parents, and was only misrepresented by the world from envy. The fact was, that this confiding husband was beginning to build upon the benefits that might accrue from not being too quick-sighted in this business; the double advantage arising from considerable damages, and a release from thralldom, when thrown into the scale, would more than counterbalance the disgrace, if, indeed, disgrace was the word for an occurrence so frequent, and so sanctioned by fashion, that his Lordship could scarce

allow himself to consider it for a moment in so plebeian a light.

It was no longer the prosecution of his unworthy views upon Emily that now gave the bias to his mind; those he had relinquished as hopeless, from the time he found Lord Cranmore's addresses were accepted, and had sought his consolation at the gaming-table, and in the celebrity of attaching to himself one of the most admired performers at the opera, whose smiles being coveted by all, could not be cheaply monopolized; and Hazard did not prove as profitable as it was captivating; what wonder, therefore, that he should see cause to speculate upon other chances, and remain inactive.

Lord Kingsborough could devise no better mode of putting a stop to what was going on, than by pretending a strong anxiety to have his first-born grandson ushered into being at the family estate in the north. He carried this point with

more ease than he had expected ; Lady Sabina's ready compliance turned upon motives of which he was not at the time aware.

The blessed day at length came that brought Emily tidings of Lord Cranmore and Henry's return ; but with the cruel alloy, that his lordship was precluded from giving way to his eager impatience to proceed to the Priory, by the necessity of awaiting his father's arrival, who had appointed to meet him in town.

The next letter brought an increase of disappointment ; the Marquis, instead of coming to London, was laid up with severe indisposition, and made a point of his going straight to Castle Ormsby, before he should make the report of his mission to the minister, who happened to be absent. There was no option, but to express passionate regrets to Emily, and obey.

Henry was also prevented from proceeding to the Priory by finding Colonel

Maxwell in town, slowly recovering from an attack of feverish languor, which he proposed shaking off by an excursion into Wales. Judging that the society of a friend might prove as beneficial to his spirits as change of air, he offered to accompany him, and was thankfully accepted ; and they set forward the following week.

When Lord Cranmore arrived at Castle Ormsby, Lady Sabina was nearly restored to the brilliancy of her beauty, after a premature confinement, brought on by imprudence and total disregard of her situation. The seven month infant, however, contrary to all expectation, lived ; but it was a girl, and consequently of no value to the Marquis, who considered girls merely as incumbrances ; nor was the Marchioness much better pleased, who seeing the inefficacy of her daughters so highly prized accomplishments to secure matrimonial felicity, or even respectability, had begun to suspect that something more might be requisite

in female education than merely the choice of the best masters of the day ; and who now shrunk from the idea of a charge, she saw so likely to devolve from the mother altogether upon herself ; for all which good reasons, the poor babe was for the present left solely to its nurse ; and thus far she was certainly the best person to whom she could be trusted, for the Doctor had conscientiously selected a healthy steady young woman, who attached herself the more to her little nursling for the general neglect with which it was treated ; it was not, however, on Lady Sabina's part any illiberal preference of one sex to the other that influenced her indifference to her offspring ; it was to children in general that she objected ; and when her brother testified an eager impatience to see his little niece, she expressed her wonder at it, “ as all children seemed to her so much alike, they could excite no interest till they began to talk.”

Every fresh instance of her heartlessness grieved Lord Cranmore to the soul, and taking the poor little slighted creature in his arms, he secretly vowed it should find a parent in him.

His apartment at Castle Ormsby had been, by his own choice, in one of the turrets the farthest removed from the part chiefly inhabited by the rest of the family. When he retired to it for the night, his man told him that the servants had got fancies into their heads about its being haunted of late, and wanted his Lordship to have another chamber; but he had not thought it worth troubling him about, as he knew his Lord had no faith in those sort of things.

Lord Cranmore told Thomson he had done right; and just then, thought no farther about the matter.

In the morning, however, the old housekeeper found her way to him, and hoped he had suffered no disturbance. Upon inquiring what sort of disturbance

she apprehended for him? she said the servants had taken it into their heads to talk about lights and noises. "But you never saw any of them, Barnes?" he said, "Why she could'nt say she had ever been much given to the fear of ghosts; but she must acknowledge she rather thought one night she heard something unusual, and was on her way to see what it could be, when she was met and stopped by Lady Sabina's woman, who laughed so exceedingly at her for believing such nonsense, and encouraging the rest in it by her example, that she had desisted from her purpose, and, indeed, almost felt ashamed of it."

Lord Cranmore was so little prone to suspicion, that this made no impression upon him, till Thomson returned to the charge the next night, by saying the old steward had been telling him he had his fears, there was mischief intended to the Castle some way or other, and he was determined to find it out; there

certainly was some trick about that light in the turret room, for he had seen it once himself, but before he could get to it, it had disappeared; and a very odd-looking person had been seen skulking about, whom nobody knew, and who seemed to take pains to conceal himself. In short, the old man had been upon the watch, with fire-arms, for the last few nights; but since Lord Cranmore's arrival, the fellow had not been seen: the steward's conjectures went to a gang that were combining to rob the house, and he had taken the men servants in turn to sit up with him.

A sudden chill struck to Lord Cranmore's heart; the recollection of what had passed between him and his sister, prior to his leaving London, came across him; and the interference of her woman in checking the investigation of Barnes, now very naturally led him to the conclusion, that the mystery had no reference to housebreaking. Lady Sabina's

perfect satisfaction and cheerfulness, under Lord Belmont's complete neglect, for he had not even been tempted to go and see his child, contributed also to point his suspicions to the Duke of Uls-water, whom he knew to be possessed of a small estate at the distance of some twenty or thirty miles from the Castle (which circumstance, from there being no habitable house upon it, had entirely escaped the memory of the Marquis, when he had proposed taking his daughter into the north with him as a security for her conduct). It only remained, therefore, to determine with himself upon the best mode of interfering, without making an *eclat* that would injure his sister's reputation; little imagining how entirely she had in his absence forfeited what he so vainly hoped to save.

A conversation next morning with his father facilitated the business; *his* suspicions had been awakened, and he had directed his confidential secretary, who

was acquainted with the Duke's person, to ascertain the resemblance there might be to it, in the disguised man; the report had brought conviction, and he only awaited the arrival of his son to concert what had best be done. He had delayed one day to speak, till he should see the effect of this event; hoping that if no other means of meeting were substituted to those which Lord Cranmore's occupation of the apartment must for the present check, it might fairly be argued, there was no intention, on the Duke's part at least, of braving the world. His Grace's former prudent retreat, with which the Marquis was now made acquainted, gave very satisfactory assurance that he would be found open to admonition; and Lord Cranmore rode over to Moorhead Farm without delay.

The Duke of Ulswater's spirit of gallantry was of too comprehensive and liberal a species, to confine itself exclusively to the destruction of any one given

female ; it rested on the broad basis of universal devotion to the sex. He had chiefly selected Lady Sabina Belmont, as the most gratifying conquest to his insatiable vanity ; not quite overlooking the circumstance, however, of her husband's early neglect, and even obvious predilection for another. Of her brothers, indeed, considering them merely as men of the world, and therefore not likely to interfere, he had taken somewhat too slight an account ; their absence had misled him into a small '*erreur de calcul*,' as he called it to himself, in imitation of his political Hero's apology for the murder of the D. d'E—.

He received Lord Cranmore with the utmost politeness ; expressed extreme astonishment to find him returned ; took shame to himself for any unguardedness in his unqualified and respectful admiration of Lady Sabina Belmont, that might have drawn the slightest censure upon her ; declaring upon *his honour* (that im-

maculate substitute for religious and moral principle) that Lady Sabina could only have been led by her conscious innocence, into any appearances that might have been misconstrued ; for he begged to repeat upon *his honour* ('yet was not the *Duke* forsworn') that nothing had passed contrary to the strictest purity ; and so jealous did he now feel himself of any injury done to her reputation through his means, that cost him what it might, he would from this hour forego all farther acquaintance. And here, indeed, his Grace was perfectly sincere ; for besides that he began to be somewhat tired of the insipidity of his fair one's conversation, he had a decided aversion for those two annoying interruptions to the freedom of elegant intercourse—duels and damages. He had hitherto judiciously evaded them ; and upon this occasion gave the most unequivocal proof of his sincerity to Lord Cranmore, by instantly setting off for

Tunbridge, to devote himself entirely to the newly married Marchioness of Tadcaster.

Lord Cranmore having settled this matter so much to his satisfaction, proceeded to London, in the blissful anticipation of approaching happiness, as a very few days more were now likely to intervene, before he should be restored to that loved presence from which he trusted never again to be parted.

Lady Sabina, who had perfectly entered into the propriety of her lover's suspended visits during her brother's short stay (for it can scarcely be necessary to give any farther elucidation of the apparitions in the uninhabited part of the Castle), waited with extreme impatience for the result of his departure; which however proved something different from what she looked for, when on the following day this billet was put into her hand by her trusty confidante.

‘ Be assured, my lovely charmer, that

the tortures I endure in banishing myself for the future from your enchanting presence, can only be surpassed by the more exquisite pangs I should feel in being the cause of any disagreeable consequences arising to you from a discovery. I sacrifice more than life to the care of your reputation, in thus bidding farewell to the happiness you have deigned to confer on your ever adoring,

‘ and eternally obliged,

‘ U——.’

The rage of the lovely charmer, on receipt of this flourishing and pathetic address, exceeded all bounds. The Duke valued himself, like his amiable prototype ‘Blamzé,’ in Marmontel’s ‘*Heureux Divorce*,’ upon an elegant winding up of an affair of gallantry; he was amiably tender of mortifying the feelings of the ladies he quitted, by avowing himself tired of them; and ever gratified their vanity, by pleading some great sacrifice: but Sabina, who had trusted to her irre-

sistible attractions, so constantly the theme of her lover's rhapsodies, for securing her a ducal coronet, the moment a discovery should free her from her present Insensible; now plainly saw she had been a dupe to her own imaginations; for in revolving all that had passed between them, she could not recollect that he had ever expressed the intention in so many words, however ambiguously he had left her to deceive herself, when she alluded to such a result. The Duke reckoned himself too strictly *honourable* to bind himself by uttering what he did not mean to fulfil; if ladies will misconstrue, that is their affair.

Sabina took it strongly to heart, vowed revenge, and inflicted it, as usually happens in similar cases, upon herself.

It was not long before the opportunity offered of putting her plan into execution; and though it somewhat forestals the regular order of events, the account

shall here find its place, that it may not break into matters of deeper interest hereafter.

The assizes at —— were expected to be brilliantly attended. Lady Sabina made no doubt of the effect of her charms being such, as would speedily bring back her truant swain upon the wings of jealousy and wounded vanity; and she could find in her heart to carry his mortification to any length, should it even reach to a duel.

Armed at all points for conquest, and assuming the affectation of gaiety and spirits to their utmost extent, her beauty acquired a degree of animation that completely dazzled the beholders; and she effectually captivated the handsomest man in the room; he was a captain of dragoons, and his unrestrained admiration quickly satisfied her, her triumph would be complete. She relied upon the celerity with which reports of this kind are circulated, for speedily reaching the ears

of the Duke, and of the consequences her vanity left her little doubt.

Her new conquest, Captain Woodland, greatly surpassed his Grace in point of personal appearance. He was well connected also ; indeed his nearest relations were deemed by the Marquis of sufficient political importance to check the determination he had made of shutting his door against any of his daughter's followers ; he found himself constrained by considerations of expediency to admit the Captain as an occasional visitor.

A footing once obtained, soon secured greater freedom of intercourse ; and his handsome person was well calculated to soften Lady Sabina's thirst for revenge into gentler feelings. She now began to dread the consequences she had first wished to provoke ; a duel might mistake its man ; and she became as careful to conceal the good understanding that was taking place, as she had at first been to make it obvious. As far as her former

admirer was concerned, she might have saved herself the trouble of thinking upon the subject; he never bestowed another thought upon her, after having acquitted himself so much to his own satisfaction in his elegant valedictory epistle.

The Captain on his part carried his views far beyond mere intrigue. Her beauty had certainly first attracted him; but he soon discovered that she might prove a means of repairing his broken fortunes; his profligacy and extravagance had caused his family to throw him off. Lord Belmont's indifference to the Duke of Ulswater's success, set any apprehension of duelling at rest. Damages were not likely to be laid high under circumstances of such notoriety; if, therefore, he could by an elopement ensure a divorce, and her subsequent marriage with himself, he made no doubt of obtaining from the pride of her relatives that support, which connexion lays

claim to, whatever may be the merits of the object.

Upon these plausible grounds he determined to enact the passionate lover, and he succeeded in awakening feelings in the breast of the Lady so new, that she gave them credit for being of a more refined nature than they had any pretension to ; and actually believed herself to be making a most heroic sacrifice to disinterested love, when she agreed to take the decisive step he so strenuously urged ; so, *un beau matin*, her Ladyship disappeared from the Castle ; and the Captain from his quarters.

CHAP. IX.

ON Lord Cranmore's return to town, his temper was again severely tried by unavoidable delays in the communications he had to make to those in office, who could not exactly suit their leisure to a lover's impatience.

He anxiously endeavoured, however, to turn this provoking circumstance so far to the relief of Emily's present anxiety on her sister's account, as to transmit every particle of information that could be gathered at the public offices, as dispatches arrived.

With deep concern and surprise had

he learnt Sir Edward Arundel's sudden departure for Spain ; and enough had been communicated by Emily, to give him a pretty clear insight into the matter as it now stood. It should, indeed, have been mentioned some chapters back, that he had become so much aware of the increasing attachment between Sophia and Sir Edward, during his residence at the Cottage, prior to his foreign mission, as to have felt it incumbent upon him to retract the assurances he had formerly given his brother of safety in that quarter. He had with gentleness stated, and with persuasive eloquence enforced to him, the propriety of relinquishing a pursuit so unpromising of success, even putting Sir Edward out of the question ; and laboured the point with all the zeal that could be inspired by the grief of having contributed to lull him into security. Judging from his own steady and deep-feeling mind, he had small reliance on the impression his arguments might make, and

opened with a trembling hand Lord Leonard's answer. How great was his astonishment at the ready acquiescence his brother's letter breathed; pleased as he was at the relief it gave to his fears, he scarce knew how to credit its sincerity, or to forgive the fickleness, if it were real. Of this Lord Leonard may give his own explanation in due time; and as the reader may not have shared Lord Cranmore's anxiety upon the subject, it is humbly hoped the remissness of not having earlier stated this change of sentiment will be overlooked.

When the news came of the last of those brilliant achievements, which, alas! have so profusely inundated the fields of Spain with the blood of our brave sons of freedom! Sir Edward Arundel's name was among the 'severely and dangerously wounded.' Lord Cranmore sent off an express with his letter, to give Emily time to break it in some degree to her sister before the post should arrive.

The wretched Sophia was scarcely more than the shadow of her former self. In the fluctuation of her hopes, fears, and self-reproach, her condition nearly bordered upon distraction : and Lord Cranmore's kindly-meant precaution was in great measure defeated, by her having been in so severely agitated a state the preceding evening, that Emily had not since left her : the letter in consequence was brought to her in Sophia's presence, before the post hour.

In agonized silence she rivetted her eyes upon Emily's face, who turned extremely pale, as she read.

“ Arundel is killed ! ” wildly screamed Sophia.

“ Indeed he is not — the very first words of the letter are, ‘ I can give you the tranquilizing assurance that there is not among the killed one name of particular interest to any individual of your family.’

“ Dangerously wounded then ! ” cried

Sophia, waiting as one transfixed for the answer.

“ I’m afraid he may be wounded ;” hesitatingly.

“ Mortally !—don’t palliate !” with a half frantic shriek.

“ Not mortally—severely don’t mean mortally.”

“ Oh ! give me conviction !” impetuously snatching the letter out of her hand.

But she trembled so exceedingly, she could not steady it sufficiently to follow the lines.

Emily pointed out the words, ‘ *severely* wounded ;’ and Sophia, who in fact saw nothing, did not perceive the *and dangerously* which followed. The paper dropped from her hands, and she sat completely stupified.

Emily sent for her mother. A very considerable length of time elapsed before Sophia could be roused to any appearance of sensibility ; but when they

had finally succeeded in producing a plentiful effusion of tears, they deemed it necessary to acknowledge the danger likewise; scarcely doubting that Lord Cranmore's communication was but a prelude to worse. The agony produced by this acknowledgment exceeded all bounds.

The arrival of the newspaper was, however, so far a relief, that it proved the words of the dispatch to have been faithfully transmitted, and no more was known.

A greater consolation was brought the next day, in a letter to Mrs. Villars written by a friend of Sir Edward's at his own desire, in which, of course, the wound was made less of, and the circumstance of 'being on his passage home' dwelt upon.

But it is necessary to go a little back, and state the occurrences as they arose.

It has been said that the explanatory letter from Mrs. Villars was put into the

hands of Sir Edward on the very day preceding that fixed upon by the Commander in Chief, for a most desperate attack. The revulsion effected by this letter is indescribable ; the joys of life once more opened to his view, and he exultingly looked forward to the next day, with the eager anticipation of its affording some opportunity of increasing his claims to that military renown so highly prized by Sophia. He imparted his ambitious wishes to the leader, with whom he had ever been on terms of friendly intimacy ; and a post of honour, but of course of danger also, was assigned to him.

No longer was it now his object however to rush into the thickest of the carnage to get rid of a hateful life ; but his gallantry cost him dearer than his recklessness had thus far done ; he acquitted himself so as to obtain particular commendation in the official dispatch ; but he was carried off the field severely wounded in the

face, and having received a shot above the knee of very doubtful issue.

The surgeon was anxious to have him sent home for such treatment as could not be secured in a marching army. This desirable result, which would bring him within reach of a happiness he might not otherwise so speedily have obtained, was what the letter chiefly dwelt on, and the danger as much slurred over as might be. Poor Sophia's tortures were in some degree alleviated by this well-judged letter, and still more so, when a kind proposal was made by Miss Maxwell to engage a near relation of her own, of high surgical eminence, to go down to Plymouth, and await the transport that should bring the wounded home—this was eagerly accepted, and almost immediately followed by another proposal of Sophia's; that she and Mrs. Villars, and Miss Maxwell should join the surgeon there. All attempts to resist this suggestion proving vain, it was acceded to ;

and their departure only awaited the accounts that should be obtained from the admiralty of the time when the transport might be expected.

It would be going one step beyond what could easily be credited, even of the disinterested Emily, to assert that she was disappointed at being excluded from attending her unhappy sister upon this occasion—in consideration, it was *said*, of the use her presence was of to Mr. Villars and Agatha ; but in fact, to secure to her a more speedy renewal of happiness in the society of the sole master of her future fate. Certain it is, that she would not have demurred an instant, had the sacrifice of her speedy re-union with him been called for ; but no less true it must be acknowledged, that she dwelt with deep internal satisfaction on the thought that every alleviating attention *she* could have devised, would be bestowed upon Sophia on this trying occasion, whilst she herself might be enjoying the con-

soling presence of him whose every hope centered in her.

During this interval of daily and hourly anxious expectation, a letter was received from Henry Villars, which somewhat diverted the thoughts of the family from the intense fixedness on the single painful topic which had taken possession of them. His tour with Colonel Maxwell had begun with South Wales, as Aberystwith offered the facility of a few salt water dips, from which the Colonel hoped to receive benefit in the debilitated state in which his late attack of illness had left him.

From Aberystwith, Henry wrote thus :

‘ My dear Emily,

‘ A circumstance of singular interest has occurred here, which I hasten to impart, in the hope that it may draw your thoughts a little away from their present anxious employment.

‘ As Colonel Maxwell and myself were yesterday setting out on our evening ramble, sounds of acute distress suddenly

caught our ear; and looking up to the cliff from whence they proceeded, we saw a child apparently dangling by its clothes, just below the very edge of the rock that starts forward into the bay, and a kneeling female figure bending down over it — the mother! — whose dismal screams seemed to proclaim at once her distress and her helplessness. A little boy was running wildly to and fro on the summit, wringing his hands and adding his piteous shrieks.

‘My propensity for seeking untrodden paths had fortunately led me to the discovery of a somewhat dangerous one, ascending from the beach up to the very spot. I darted forwards, in the hope of intercepting the fall, while Maxwell with his utmost speed made his way by the usual path up the hill towards the mother. My most fortunate agility brought me to the poor child’s rescue, at the very moment that the half-decayed branch by which she hung, was separating from its parent

stump, by which the mother, who grasped her clothes, without power to do more, must have lost her hold, or been dragged after her; an indenture of the rock afforded me sufficient steadiness to support the child, till Colonel Maxwell's stronger arm came in aid of the feeble grasp that had held her, and drew her up.

'I easily made good my own way to the summit; the poor woman no sooner saw her safe, than she fainted away—the child in Colonel Maxwell's arms was in the same state—but the emotion of the boy, between his insensible mother and sister, is not to be described—running from one to the other—shrieking, sobbing, —“Mamma dead! — Nellin dead!”—wholly unconscious of any thing we could say to appease him, screaming occasionally too, for “Jannie to come back;” this gave us a hope, that some one belonging to them was at hand, for we were perplexed what to do. It was not

long, however, before the little girl, who was not essentially hurt, only stupified by her fright, gave symptoms of returning sense by putting up her cherub mouth to kiss her brother, “don’t cry so!—be dear good boy!—tell Jannie take me home.”—He now vociferated “Jannie!” with all his might.—“Tell me where Jannie is,” I said to the reviving little girl, “and I will fetch her in an instant”—but she had by this time caught sight of her mother in a state of perfect insensibility, and joined her wailings to those of her brother, and nothing we could say attracted their attention.

‘ In this dilemma we had just agreed that I should run down into the town for medical and other help, the appearance of the poor woman being such as greatly alarmed us, when Jannie came in sight—the children instantly darted towards her, screaming, “Oh! now Jannie will make mamma alive again!”

‘ “Merciful God deliver me!” exclaim-

ed the old Scotch woman as she approached, "What's aw this? how cam she to faint?"

' "Let's lose no time in explanations, my good woman, but tell us where to take her to."

' "Take her!—troth, I can do that mysel—it's no the first time I hae borne her in these arms;" whipping her up as she spoke, as if it had been an infant—"what ha' ye done tull her i' God's name, to frighten her into her fits?" eyeing us with an air of terrified suspicion.

' "Don't be angry, Jannie!" cried the dear little fellow, who at this moment seemed to have the recollection burst upon him of what had occurred; "O dear, dear, good man!" seizing my hand, and kissing it with fervour; "save poor Nellin from falling into sea and be drowned!" and his little heart filled and overflowed at his eyes, as he hung about my neck, for I had caught him up in my arms. You know, Emily, how I love

children, and never was there a finer little creature than this.

‘The old woman now was fain to apologise; but we checked all conversation, hurrying her on at her utmost speed, with her still insensible burthen; Maxwell carrying the little girl, till we could reach some place of shelter to deposit the mother in, and have recourse to the necessary means of restoration.

‘Fortunately her own lodgings were the first habitation we reached, and her footman was instantly dispatched for the apothecary. On our inquiring the lady’s name, “She *calls* herself Sidney,” answered the woman, with a marked emphasis on the word *call*.’

(It was immaterial to mention at the time, though it now requires to be stated, that Henry, having been again obliged to leave town immediately after his return from investigating at the Priory the grounds for Katty’s letter, was absent during Lord Cranmore’s confessions; and as

the subject was then satisfactorily set at rest, and by no means agreeable to touch upon, neither his Lordship nor Emily had ever alluded to it, with him.)

‘ Maxwell gave a start of surprise, which bespoke some prior knowledge of her ; but he has since evaded my curiosity upon the subject. His interest in her was, however, evidently increased by the discovery. Her maid said, she was in a wretched state of health, and very subject to fainting fits. He watched her returning consciousness with the most anxious solicitude. As she at length opened her languid eyes, they rested upon him : with something of a look of surprise, she faintly articulated, “ What has happened ? ” and before he could answer, she uttered a wild scream, “ Oh ! my Ellen ! where ! where is she ? ” — “ Safe, perfectly safe and unhurt,” he replied ; “ yourself madam is all you need to be anxious for at this moment.”

‘ “ Myself ! *my* life is of no value to any one ! ” she feebly answered.

“ Waes me! my bairn! dinna say that ye’ll just break *my* auld heart gen I lose ye,” cried her old servant.

“ I had been at rest long ago, but for you Janet,” putting out her hand; which the poor woman seized and wept upon.

“ Will you suffer the interference of a stranger, madam?” said Maxwell, “ to put a stop to all exertion of speech, on your part, till the arrival of the surgeon we have sent for, shall ascertain what degree of quiet may be necessary, after the severe agitation you have undergone.”

“ Thank you, sir! I perceive I am deeply indebted to you—I submit—let me but see my child is safe—”

“ Janet now came for the little girl, who, with her brother, had been hanging about me, with a speechless affection and gratitude in their looks and caresses, that penetrated my inmost heart; and it was beautiful to see the tender caution with which they stole on tiptoe to their

mother's bedside, because Janet charged them to be still, that they might not make her worse.

“Are you sure you are not any ways hurt, my darling?” she anxiously inquired.

“Not bad, mamma—my back a little sore.”

‘The poor little love had made no complaint, and Janet, not yet fully informed of the nature of the accident, had not thought of examining her—when she did, she found the back very considerably chafed; “but she just takes after her mother,” said the old woman, “never thinks o’ hersel, or makes a complaint.”’

‘Our inquiries to-day have been answered by an invitation to tea in the afternoon. When I write again, I may probably be able to tell you more—the fine boy has been with me great part of the morning—and a remarkably interesting child he is; but if I were to begin upon him, I should write a volume, and for the present you have had enough.’

CHAP. X.

THE feelings excited in Emily by the perusal of her brother's letter, were of no common sort. She could not for a moment doubt who Mrs. Sidney was; and a deep interest took possession of her breast, already prepared to commiserate the unhappy woman's situation, from Mrs. Valacort's having acknowledged what Colonel Maxwell had imparted respecting her. His start of recognition at the name, confirmed the identity of the person—"sinking probably under the consciousness and pressure of her errors—deserted—
forlorn.—' My life is of no value to any

one !' she had despondingly said. But it shall be restored to the value that virtuous penitence can impart ; thou poor blighted flower !—the hand of kindness shall administer balm to thy diseased mind—religious consolations shall raise thy drooping head. Though thou should'st shrink from the wife of Cranmore, my mother—my sister will befriend thee !"—and tears followed these thoughts, as they passed through the mind of Emily. " I will foster those lovely children," she went on ; " assist her in the arduous task of guarding their young minds—we will cover the disgrace of their birth by the pre-eminence of their virtues !"

She hastened to impart her letter and views to Sophia ; and even *her* sorrow gave way for a moment to the interest of Henry's narrative ; and eagerness to devise some alleviation. They agreed upon informing him of all they had before known of the poor woman's story ; accompanied

with an urgent request, that he would prolong his stay at Aberystwith, and consult with Colonel Maxwell, in what way they might come to her succour without mortifying her feelings.

In this consultation they were interrupted by the arrival of an express from Lord Cranmore, with the information that the telegraph gave notice of the transport being arrived at the Lands-end, whence it might be expected to reach Plymouth the next day.

Not an instant was now to be lost.—Sophia, Mrs. Villars, and Miss Maxwell set off without delay.

The state of Sophia admits of no description—it can scarce be imagined; but her frantic steps may be followed to the water's edge; it was impossible to controul them. There she stood—supported by her mother and Miss Maxwell, watching with convulsive eagerness the removal of the wounded into the boats that were to bring them on shore. The

surgeon had secured one for Sir Edward, in which he had himself gone ; and by attending to his motions they could descry the object of their immediate concern. — Upon seeing his apparently lifeless form, lifted down the ship's side, Sophia uttered an agonized scream, and fainted. She was borne back to their lodgings, to all appearance in as lifeless a state as her lover.

Both the one and the other were, however, soon restored to consciousness ; Sophia received from Mr. Preston the consoling assurance that his patient was in as fair a way, as from the nature of his wounds he could possibly have expected to find him ; and Sir Edward's mind was tranquilized by the soothing information, that the object for whom alone he wished to live, had evinced her affection, by coming herself, to witness the steps taken for his accommodation and preservation.

But Mr. Preston was, peremptory in opposing an interview between them—

thus far the fever had been happily kept down, and if it could continue so, all would, he hoped, end well; but he would not answer for the consequences of the slightest agitation. Sophia was compelled to submit to this award. She had just sufficient power of reason left, to feel its necessity—but to obtain her consent to removing from the very next door to him—where every quarter of an hour, and sometimes every five minutes, gained her intelligence of his state; was more than the united powers of Mrs. Villars, Miss Maxwell, and the surgeon could accomplish.

The arrival of Lord Cranmore, however, facilitated the matter. Emily had written in the most urgent terms to entreat his joining them there. In reflecting upon the essential service his presence might be of, she could scarce forgive herself for the selfish wish that had for a moment caused her to rejoice in being left behind—it was not often she had to

accuse herself of a feeling of the sort ; and she now made speedy amends for it, in her answer to the letter she received the very morning after their departure, in which he had announced the conclusion of his diplomatic concern ; by the request that he would turn his steps to Plymouth. Great as he felt the sacrifice, he could not hesitate, and he proceeded thither as rapidly as four post-horses could carry him.

He no sooner became aware of the true state of the patient, than he undertook to convince Sophia, of what she had refused to credit, when asserted by Mr. Preston ; that the very circumstance of knowing her to be so near him, kept the mind of Sir Edward from being restored to the quiescent state, so very necessary to his well doing.

Next to herself, she believed Lord Cranmore to take the deepest interest in Sir Edward—she knew him besides to be wholly incapable of urging a false plea—

and she felt sure that he would be faithful to the promise he tendered, of not relinquishing his attendance till a removal to London could be safely undertaken ; where Mr. Preston was extremely anxious to have him conveyed, for more reasons than he chose to explain to those so deeply interested. However reluctant, she therefore finally agreed to return with her mother and friend to the Priory—where in truth she seemed scarcely alive, but at the hours of expected intelligence ; which of course was transmitted with all the punctuality that could possibly be desired. Little variation, was, however, to be looked for, until the hazardous experiment of removal could be effected.

Meanwhile, a letter from Colonel Maxwell to his niece, opened a new source of disquietude.

It began by cautioning her to read it when she should be perfectly alone, and could command sufficient time to consider of the best mode of proceeding after

she should have read it ; as he felt himself placed in a very embarrassing and delicate predicament.

He then went on, to a brief statement of what Henry had detailed more at length ; he adverted to his surprise at the name of Sidney, and dwelt a good deal on the impression her appearance, her artlessness, and her despondence, had made upon him. He had been unwilling, in the first moment, to inform Villars who she was, as it might place him in an awkward situation respecting his sister—but he would proceed regularly with his narrative, that she might use her best judgment on the merits of the case ; and he thus went on :—‘ The old Scotch woman, her servant, had been on the watch for an opportunity to speak to me, unobserved by Henry or her lady ; and the instant it offered, she abruptly, and in great apparent agitation, asked my leave to wait upon me privately, having something of great moment to say. I ap-

pointed the following morning, when I knew my companion would be gone to bathe.

‘ She came accordingly, and opened her business with a very natural expression of fear, that I might think ill of her addressing an entire stranger upon a subject of such peculiar delicacy ; but my Scotch name, and my trustworthy countenance, had emboldened her to seek my advice, in a circumstance that weighed heavily upon her mind—and the poor creature’s emotion made it difficult for her to go on. I told her my best advice should be at her service, and encouraged her to proceed.

‘ She said she had faithfully kept the secret of her lady’s claims upon Lord Cranmore, and should have continued to do so, whilst he remained single ; but now that she found he was going to be married, and her dear bairns’ disgrace would be confirmed by such a step ; the secret burnt in her bosom, and she could keep

it no longer—but she knew not what to do! Here tears seemed to choak her utterance. I said, her mistress must judge for herself in this case. “*She* would wrong herself over and over again, before she would interfere with *his* wishes,” Janet said. “Why, then, who can interfere with any effect?”—“But, sir, is it not against the law of the land to contract another marriage while his first wife—”—“Wife!” I interrupted; “I never heard Mrs. Sidney laid any claim to that title!”—“Nor would she, during her existence,” answered Janet; “but she’s as surely his wife, by the laws of Scotland, as you are sitting there.” I warned her to take care how she asserted what might not admit of proof. “Deed an I’ll prove it by any oath ye shall see fit to administer,” she exclaimed; “Sure, I was witness tull’t mysel—” “Witness to what?” I asked. “To his putting a ring upon her finger, and making declaration before her uncle, and aunt, and myself, that he took Miss Helen

to wife! Far less than that, you know, sir, would stand good in our country." I knew it but too well, indeed. Oh, the dear Emily Villars! what a stroke will this be to her! for you are aware that this is actually sufficient to substantiate the boy's right to the Scotch title and estate at least. I felt for a moment enraged at the old woman's officiousness; but the deep importance to Emily herself obliged me to be calm, and endeavour to ascertain the truth as far as I could. I asked her whether Lord Cranmore denied the circumstance? "She could not accuse him of that—she could not be sure how that was—for Miss Helen was so scrupulous—and to be sure, my lord was not just sober at the time—and Miss Helen had made her swear never to divulge the fact, unless she herself absolved her from the oath; for no power she said, should ever make her hold him to it." I repeated my question whether Lord Cranmore had ever in any way

countenanced the assertion. — She did not believe that from that hour to this, it had ever been recalled to his mind. I scarce know how to credit a disinterestedness so extraordinary. — I asked whether she had preserved the ring; but it seems it was the aunt's ring, and only put into his hand for the purpose. “But if she is so romantically careless of her own fame, does she not consider how she is sacrificing her children?” I said. “Many's the time I have urged this to her,” the old woman replied; “and she has always said, her life would not be long, and she should take care they should be righted at her death; but it's just herself I cannot bear to see stamped with disgrace, when she's as truly Lady Cranmore as you are Colonel Maxwell.” — The faithful creature burst into a fresh passion of tears, wringing her hands and exclaiming “What can I do to save her!” — I endeavoured to pacify her, promising to revolve in my mind what she had told

me ; and recommending the strictest silence on her part, till I could form some determination upon the subject, in which I assured her, I felt very strongly interested ; but how to assert a lady's claims contrary to her own inclination, is a matter of no common difficulty.—“ Aye, there it is,” cried Janet ; “ it's just hersel' that she never cares or thinks about, when others' happiness is concerned. You'll never see her like for that.” I inquired what had become of the uncle and aunt. He is dead, and the aunt had disappeared—she knew not whither. Gone to the devil, I suppose ; for this trick of the ring has no doubt been some cursed hypocritical salvo for her own concurrence in consigning the poor innocent to ruin. I had some difficulty to pacify the old woman too, upon the score of her broken oath ; which, I assured her, I thought her affectionate zeal compensated ; in short, there is that faithful simplicity about the creature, that I

cannot doubt of a word she has uttered ; and I must confess she left me more perplexed than ever I was in my life.

‘ The single idea that suggested itself, was to make an attempt at obtaining Mrs. Sidney’s confidence ; as it could only be in consequence of a statement of her own, and employed by her, that I could have any plea for interfering with Lord Cranmore ; and I took every mode I could devise, to lead the conversation to the point I had in view ; but in vain—she was impenetrable.

‘ I therefore now refer the whole to you, dear Marianne : there seems not a moment to be lost. I conclude you will deem it best to communicate what I have written to Mrs. Villars, but I leave it to your dispassionate judgment ; only bear in mind the situation in which Emily would be placed, should she ignorantly form the connexion, and the subsequent claim on the part of this boy be brought forward. But how can Lord Cranmore

possibly be unconscious?—by heaven! it seems to me the most unaccountable thing altogether!—but as I cannot account for it, I will not perplex you: so act to the best of your judgment, which has seldom led you wrong.

‘ Henry has received a letter from his sister, as I suppose you know, interesting him very strongly indeed in the fate of this unhappy young woman; but he has no suspicion of what I have told you; and I shall carefully keep it from him for the present. Quiet and reserved as his natural habits are, his powerful integrity of principle might drive him into stronger measures with Lord Cranmore than I should hope may prove necessary. My penetration has been desperately at fault, if Cranmore himself be not a man of the strictest honour. It is an incomprehensible affair!’

As soon as Miss Maxwell could recover from the extreme disturbance this unlooked-for disclosure gave her, she

without hesitation resorted to Mrs. Villars, with the letter.

The mind of Mrs. Villars was not easily thrown off its bias ; distressing as the communication was, she gave it calm and deliberate consideration ; and a point of the utmost importance appeared to her, in the first instance, to be, the obtaining an avowal of the fact from Mrs. Sidney. This might best be brought about by female interference, and she soon settled the plan in her mind.

Sophia's natural turn for the romantic, would make her a most desirable assistant upon this occasion, if it were possible to draw her out of her present torpid state ; and the exertion might prove beneficial to herself. Agatha offered an ostensible motive for an excursion to the sea ; she had of late outgrown her strength, and a more open sea than the baths at Southampton offer, had been recommended for her. Leaving Miss Maxwell with Emily was ensuring a gentle

and judicious breaking of the cruel business to her, should it be found necessary.

Mrs. Villars lost no time in making the communication, and her own proposal upon it, to Sophia; who was effectually roused to a sense of the misery that threatened her sister, and somewhat influenced too, possibly, by the singularly romantic circumstances of the case. She readily acquiesced in her mother's wish, and immediate preparations were made for their departure on the following day; the reason assigned to Emily for its suddenness, being the very natural wish of finding Henry still at Aberystwith. Mrs. Villars's woman only was to attend them, as Mademoiselle Victoire's spirit of investigation made her absence rather desirable upon this occasion.

Sophia felt—deeply felt, that she was removing to a greater distance from the daily intelligence which to her was become the food of life; but her strong affection for her sister now seemed to call

for any sacrifice she could make. Poor Emily, on her part, expressed the utmost eagerness that opportunity might offer for Sophia to concur in the task that had been assigned to Henry; and enjoined her at all events to find means of showing kindness to the children. This was almost more than Sophia could stand; and her emotion might have excited alarm in Emily at any other time; but she now attributed every appearance of the kind to anxiety for Sir Edward.

CHAP. XI.

COLONEL Maxwell received the answer to his letter in sufficient time to prepare Henry for the arrival of his mother and sister, upon the plea of Agatha's health. Henry made no doubt but Mrs. Sidney had a share in Sophia's accession to this sudden plan; and rejoiced in the assistance she would give him in performing the task that had been enjoined him; in which he had as yet not been able to make any progress, from the reserve on the part of Mrs. Sidney, that instantly checked the slightest approach to confidential subjects. It was with consider-

able surprise he heard the Colonel say, that he should immediately inform Mrs. Sidney, who, was expected. Henry apprehended his mother's respect for the world's opinion would induce her to check any ostensible intercourse on the part of Sophia. Colonel Maxwell said, he thought the remoteness of the place, and the respectability of Mrs. Sidney's conduct, would induce Mrs. Villars to deviate from her general maxims. Henry combated this point with earnestness, from the fear of mortifying Mrs. Sidney, by raising expectations from which his mother would draw back; but the Colonel adhered to his assertion, and was determined, he said, to pave the way, by mentioning that Mrs. Villars and Mrs. Delmere were coming; accordingly he took the first opportunity of doing so. Mrs. Sidney changed colour, but said nothing.

After a little pause, he added, " You

will see very uncommonly amiable women in these two ladies."

"*I* cannot expect, Colonel Maxwell, to have any opportunity of judging of them."

"I imagine Mr. Villars's report of you, will very naturally lead them to seek your acquaintance."

"I am already under obligations to Mr. Villars, far beyond what I shall ever know how to acknowledge sufficiently; but I cannot suffer him to—I mean—this is an honour I am absolutely compelled to decline." This was spoken in extreme agitation.

"Mrs. Sidney, you have flattered me that you could, notwithstanding the shortness of our acquaintance, consider me in the light of a friend; will you allow me to prove myself such, by offering you my advice?"

"I should, indeed, be thankful for it; a friend is what I have not yet had the

fortune to meet with, except in poor Janet ;” and tears forced their way.

“ Do not hold back from the acquaintance of Mrs. Villars and Mrs. Delmere, if they seek it.”

“ Alas, sir ! they cannot seek it, but from ignorance of who I am, and I will owe nothing to deception.”

“ Would you empower me to settle that matter with them.”

“ Surely, Colonel Maxwell, you must know that I am not in a situation to be visited—and by these ladies of all others !”
—She could not go on.

Poor Helen’s fortitude had been severely tried in the discovery of who it was, that had saved the life of her child ; the conflict between her gratitude and the miserable feelings the very name of Villars called up, had been dreadfully harassing to her susceptible unsettled mind ; and now the bare idea of encountering the females of the family seemed

to sink her to the very earth. Independently, however, of the peculiar feelings connected with *them*, it must be said that she was so perfectly conscious of the situation in which she chose to let herself be placed, that she would not have suffered any woman of reputation to be deceived into forming an acquaintance with her; and from those who had less cause for fastidiousness on that score, she had ever kept aloof; so that in fact she had no habits of female society whatever.

“These ladies of all others,” said Colonel Maxwell, taking up her words, “are exactly those, who will know how to allow, for the possibility of being innocently thrown into a situation of doubtful appearance.

Helen gave a slight start, but made no answer.

“I have reason to think,” he continued, “that Mrs. Villars is prepared to

take an interest in you, that will lead her to seek you !”

“ Good heaven, Colonel Maxwell ! can she know any thing more of me than from her son’s representation ?”

“ I believe she does.”

“ Oh ! I shall sink into the earth with confusion at the sight of her.”

“ Be assured she would not seek you to mortify you ; it will only be with views of kindness, if she intrudes upon your seclusion.”

“ The bare idea of it strikes an awe to my heart that I can never get over !” Her emotion became so overpowering that he put an end to the conversation, by saying, “ we will let the matter rest for the present ; time enough to renew it, if her urgency should resist your scruples ; you will not object to my repeating what has passed between us.”

“ O no !—give such force to my objections as may spare me this cruel trial !”

Henry had absented himself at his friend's desire from this conversation, and taken the children with him. Miss Maxwell had been instructed by Mrs. Villars to urge to the Colonel the expediency of continuing to keep him in ignorance, till the affair could be thoroughly investigated.

Mrs. Villars and Mrs. Delmere arrived according to expectation.

Mrs. Villars felt herself placed in a new and very trying situation. She was voluntarily seeking to bring to light circumstances which must blast her daughter's every prospect ; but she saw no alternative. If this poor girl's claims proved, what they were represented to be, no matter how far they might be set at nought in an English court of law, *in foro conscientiæ*, they could not be cancelled—not at least with feelings such as Emily's. A shade likewise rested at this moment upon the integrity of Lord Cranmore, who had stated nothing of this nature in his appeal to Mrs. Villars ;

and was it possible to give him credit for absolute ignorance of such a circumstance? Such a doubt alone was sufficient to mar the happiness of the sensitive upright Emily—the matter must be satisfactorily cleared up—and she armed herself with firmness to meet the event; but the agitation of her spirits was immediately obvious to Colonel Maxwell, who had, during a visit he made in Spring at the Priory, been so particularly struck with the serene cheerfulness that characterized her.

Grievously, indeed, was Henry shocked to behold the ravage, unhappiness had made with his sister, in the months that had elapsed since they had met. He had before seen her eye dimmed, and her bloom impaired by sorrow, but now the canker of self-reproach had preyed upon her beauty, till he could scarce recognize her; the turn of her countenance, the tone of her voice, the languor of her movements—all spoke a complication of

woe that cut him to the soul. She had, however, experienced the consolation, upon her arrival at Aberystwith, of finding a letter from Lord Cranmore, announcing the happy accomplishment of Sir Edward Arundel's removal to London, with less of suffering from fatigue than Mr. Preston could have hoped.

A ray of satisfaction spread itself over her pale features, such as had not for many a month illumined them. She listened with interest to Colonel Maxwell's account of his conversation with Mrs. Sidney, and immediately proposed to cut the business of introduction short, by way-laying her evening walk, and taking her by surprise. The Colonel approved of the suggestion; but in consideration of the very delicate state of Mrs. Sidney's nerves, he proposed that Mrs. Villars should keep back for the present.

Great was the astonishment of Henry to find his mother concurring in plans for an acquaintance which he had felt so

sure would have met her decided reprobation; not having the most remote suspicion of the truth, his pleasure kept pace with his surprise; for Mrs. Sidney and her children had taken very deep hold upon his feelings.

The plan was executed according to Sophia's proposal. Henry, with his sister leaning on his arm, and Agatha by her side, took the path in which he was sure of meeting Helen, setting forth on her evening walk. On perceiving them, she shrunk back in terror, and called the children to her, purposing to return homeward; but they no sooner espied Henry, than with eager exclamations of delight, they ran forwards, unmindful of their mother's call, and thus thwarted her intention. Sophia taking advantage of the circumstance, immediately claimed acquaintance with the little people; by expressing her pleasure to see their looks so much improved from what they were when in her neighbourhood, at Boxmount

Cottage. The tone of kindness to the children, instantly made its way to the heart of the mother; and all sense of dread vanished before the cordial look of good-will and peculiar frankness of Mrs. Delmere's manner; who quickly added, that "Agatha would be delighted to meet with such lively little companions in her walks." Agatha so encouraged, lost not a moment to make her aunt's words good; but seized a hand of each of the children, and proposed setting out forthwith in quest of shells, which she concluded they knew where to find; and Henry offering his other arm to Mrs. Sidney, she could not avoid following the steps of the young leaders.

Sophia, who now gave her mind entirely to the object she had in view; and who was by mental suffering subdued to a tone of gentleness that lent an irresistible charm to her other attractions; gained so complete an ascendancy over the fears of her companion, in the course of their

walk, and converted them into such unqualified admiration, that Mrs. Sidney was not much startled when, upon their separating, a proposal was made for introducing her next day to Mrs. Villars.

During this walk, Mrs. Villars had an opportunity of hearing from Colonel Maxwell a variety of circumstances, tending either immediately or remotely to corroborate the testimony of old Janet; so as not to leave her the shadow of a doubt that this unhappy young creature was actually the victim of her own enthusiastic disinterestedness.

The manner of Mrs. Villars was not of the highest polish, but it was better; it was the spontaneous effusion of a heart overflowing with the milk of human kindness. The strongest feelings of compassion now also took possession of her mind, and she received poor Helen in a way well calculated to obliterate every impression, but those of love and confidence, from her breast.

Opportunity quickly offered to those so deeply interested, of leading the conversation to points that might somewhat unfold the turn of Helen's disposition and thoughts. To the inquiry after her favourite occupations, she replied, "Reading, and ornamental work for her children."

"What kind of reading did she prefer?"

"Poetry—novels—plays."

"Who was her favourite poet?"

"Pope—Prior. She had the Epistle to Abelard, as well as Henry and Emma, by heart. She knew no heroines to compare to them. She had thrown aside Rousseau's Eloise in extreme indignation, when she found her giving up her lover to her father; '*she* knew nothing of love who could act so,' she said; but above all she delighted in the German sentimentalists; in short, the enthusiastic Helen had bewildered her untutored mind in such a labyrinth of nonsense—

had rioted in the luxury of indiscriminate novel reading, till reason was wholly overpowered by imagination. The wild energy of her expressions, contrasted so singularly with the simplicity, amounting almost to childishness of mind and manner, which manifested itself upon all occasions, that Mrs. Villars and Sophia felt interested beyond what they could have conceived.

Her exterior was very attractive, without any approach to regular beauty; her's was the 'sleepy eye that speaks the melting soul;' she had fine teeth, a sweet smile, a delicately fair complexion, heightened into brilliancy by the deceptious bloom peculiar to the malady under which she laboured; her form, by nature slight, was reduced almost to a skeleton; and perfectly careless of dress, and appearance, she made no attempt to conceal the ravages of illness. A more artless child of nature never came out of nature's hands.

She took the first opportunity in which she found herself alone with the ladies, of adverting to their condescension in noticing her; and expressed her gratitude in the warmest terms. She added, with considerable emotion, that "she hoped Miss Villars was very like Mrs. Delmere, and then Lord Cranmore would be happy."

"And can you really be so entirely divested of self?" Mrs. Villars asked, "as to wish him happy with another."

"Not if *I* could have continued to make him happy myself; but when I lost that power, why not?"

"Might not his continuing single, ultimately bring him back to a sense of what he owes you for the great sacrifice you have made to him."

"Sacrifice!" she repeated. "I thought it no sacrifice to please him. I had no other happiness."

"Did you set no value on the opinion of the world?"

“ *He* was my world !”

“ Poor child !—and no mother to guard you !”

The look and tone in which this was said, were so new to Helen, they vibrated upon her heart, and filled her eyes.

“ Mother !—O no !—she has long been dead.”

“ And your aunt took no trouble to advise you ?”

“ My aunt always said—I don’t know how to tell you what she said—but indeed I did not act upon that !”

“ Pray repeat what your aunt said !” cried Sophia eagerly.

“ She said I was pretty,” blushing up to her eyes as she spoke, “ and I must make the most of it !”

“ Shocking !—but your Bible would strengthen you against such vile suggestions,” observed Mrs. Villars.

“ Would it ?—but I had no Bible.”

“ Good heaven !—and no one to teach you what it enjoined ?”

“ I had no confessor after I left Ireland.”

“ Confessor!—you are then a Roman Catholic ?”

“ Yes—no—that is I was—but Sidney was not—and so I wanted to be of his religion. I was sure he must be right.”

Poor Helen!—she was indeed a disciple of the German school—substituting sentiment for principle.—Love, was *her* religion, and she acted accordingly.

“ And it probably did not suit Sidney’s views to have you better instructed,” said Mrs. Villars.

“ O madam! you wrong Sidney, if you attribute my misconduct to any views of his. I have no one to blame but myself.”

“ And you possibly glossed over your error to your own conscience, by determining to consider yourself as his wife, in the eye of heaven.” Mrs. Villars spoke this pointedly, in the hope of bringing

her to an avowal of the important circumstance.

After a moment's hesitation, she replied, "I only considered how I might make him happy."

"And did not such disinterestedness on your part awaken his generosity? I can see but little difference between misleading, or suffering so innocent and artless a being, as he found in you, to mislead yourself." Finding she did not readily answer, Mrs. Villars continued, "Was not the taking the name of Sidney a deception? it does not belong to his family."

"Indeed it was his true name then. He had taken it for an estate left him by a distant relation of his mother, before his father came to the title; and I can never bear to call him by any other than that, in which all my short-lived happiness was comprised."

"Short-lived indeed! — moments of

bliss purchased by years of repentance and misery !”

“ O ! not so, madam !—not so indeed !—I never have for an instant repented—regret—not repentance, wastes my life—regret that I had not attraction sufficient to retain him, for whom alone I wished to live.”

“ And not a shadow of resentment for the dereliction !” exclaimed Sophia : “ this is a devotedness I could not have credited, had I read of it.”

“ Dear madam ! recollect how far, that of Emma surpassed it !”

“ But *that* you know to be a fiction.”

“ Ah, he well knew woman’s love tho’ who feigned it !”

“ To submit to obloquy, while a lover’s passion continues to repay the sacrifice, is what many a deluded victim has done before ; but voluntarily and uncomplainingly to take up with the loss of character—”

“ Would any one,” she interrupted

precipitately, “that truly loved, hesitate to lay down their *life* for the happiness of the object of their affection?”

“Oh no!” cried Sophia, with enthusiasm.

“Such heroic devotion is not common, but I believe it may exist,” said Mrs. Villars.

“And what am I doing more, in submitting without complaint, my happiness to his? Had he said, ‘Die, Helen! your death will make me happier than your life!’ I would have been content to receive my death at his hand; or if I could have believed it his wish, I think it should not have been long in coming to my relief. But he said, ‘Live Helen! for the sake of my children, and be good; and my friendship shall ever continue yours.’ So I have tried to obey him; but I feel it will not be much longer now before I am at rest.”

Sophia embraced her with warmth. Mrs. Villars could not restrain her tears.

Helen was ready to worship them for sympathy so un hoped for.

“ And do you conceive that you have a right to extend your disinterestedness to the detriment of your children ?”

“ Oh no !” she exclaimed with quickness, “ my children will be exonerated from disgrace when I am out of the way ; that increases my impatience” — She stopt suddenly, feeling she was betraying her secret.

“ How so ?”

“ Forgive me, madam !—I cannot explain.”

“ So very little is required to constitute a marriage by Scotch law, that perhaps—”

“ I entreat you, madam !” interrupting her precipitately, “ not to urge me upon this point.”

“ I will not urge any thing to give you pain,” returned Mrs. Villars, quite convinced, by what had now unintentionally dropped from her : “ you are a most ex-

traordinary creature! and have excited an interest in me beyond what I could have believed possible under the existing circumstances. I will wait for farther confidence, till you shall be satisfied how safely you may repose it.”

And Mrs. Villars, with an oppressed heart, left her, to write an account to Miss Maxwell of what had passed; with a view to her preparing poor Emily for what now seemed inevitable.

CHAP. XII.

LORD Cranmore was most painfully detained in London by Emily's urgent entreaty not to leave Sir Edward in his present precarious state. A consultation of eminent surgeons had finally 'decided against the amputation of the leg, which at first had appeared to Mr. Preston unavoidable; although the extraordinarily reduced and feeble state of the patient had made it seem too hazardous, for him to take the decision upon himself, at Falmouth. The fever was still however so constantly kept up by the daily exfoliations from the jawbone, which had been severely fractured, as to make the progress in

amendment gradual, to a degree that rendered it scarcely perceptible.

This was a severe test of devotedness to the will of the lady of his fate—for Lord Cranmore could not be of any material use to the sufferer; and however affectionately interested for him, he did not, like poor Sir Edward, subscribe to old Montaigne's already quoted decision upon the subject of love and friendship—in fact, his adoration of Emily was so compounded of the two sentiments, as to make it impossible to draw a line of demarcation between them.

Lord Leonard Ormsby's expected return at this juncture promised a most seasonable relief from the cruel attendance—his friendly care might equally be relied on, now that all rivalry was so decidedly out of the question; for his protracted stay in Ireland had been avowedly to cultivate the apparent partiality of an agreeable little widow possessing a jointure of £4000 a year, at

her own disposal; which, together with her due sense of his Lordship's merits, had given her a preponderance over the distant and insensible Sophia. And this was what had so fully prepared him to give a ready assent to the arguments urged by his brother, when he had imparted his mistake respecting Sir Edward Arundel.

Lord Cranmore settled it in his own mind, that a very few hours after his brother's arrival should terminate his absence from his heart's idol; and his impatience increased, as the so long wished-for moment approached.

"I have but staid to embrace you, my dear Leonard," he exclaimed; "to constitute you head nurse in my stead, to our wounded friend; and now I fly on the wings of love, to claim my adored Emily—

"Nay, nay—not the very moment I arrive, Cranmore! Give me one day for all we have to hear and to tell—"

"If you knew how my heart has been

tortured by delays, you would not so much as ask an hour, Leonard. You would think that my even stopping for this momentary sight of you, could only be prompted by no common brotherly feeling, and repay it by hastening my steps to my so cruelly protracted happiness."

"But you talk of constituting me head nurse in your stead; what do I know of nursing? and scarcely do I know enough of Arundel to take any responsibility upon me."

Lord Cranmore, hurt and surprised to find his good-humoured brother starting difficulties where he expected the kindest concurrence in forwarding his wishes, replied, in somewhat of an altered tone, "I am not selfishly seeking to put you upon very trying duty; for in fact poor Arundel's state does not admit of anything being done for his comfort, but by the medical attendants and actual nurses. He can neither be allowed to

“speak, as it moves the jaw ; nor has he as yet even strength to be read to. It is therefore merely for the daily and hourly reports to Mrs. Delmere, that my attendance has been deemed of such consequence.”

“The devil, Cranmore ! this is worse and worse ! how can I correspond with the quondam sovereign of my destiny, whose chains I have thrown off, and about my rival too !” Lord Leonard sought to disguise real anxiety under affected playfulness ; but his brother interrupted him with extreme seriousness.

“If my peace is of any value to you, Leonard, you will make no more objections. Write to Mrs. Villars, instead of Mrs. Delmere ; I will accompany it with an explanatory line ; and by the time I have written it, my carriage will be at the door—”

“Why then, my dear fellow !” more seriously, “the fact is, that I cannot let

you go till—till I have imparted something of consequence—and—and curse me! if I know how to set about giving you pain—”

“ You have been doing *that* for the last few minutes, so do not hesitate—no serious distress in which you are involved I hope—”

“ No—would to heaven it were!—I don’t take my own distresses long to heart. The thing is—devil take me if I know how to begin!—but—but—are you quite sure, Cranmore, Helen has no claims upon you?”

“ Helen!” starting in amazement.

“ Are you quite aware, my dear fellow, how little goes to legalizing a Scotch marriage?”

“ What can you mean? never did the most remote idea of marriage enter either into her head or mine!”

“ Can you be morally certain that in no tender moment of your long connexion

you might utter what, if now brought forward against you, would tie you down—”

“Great God of heaven!” exclaimed Lord Cranmore; “the bare suggestion of such a possibility would go near to drive me mad—by all that’s sacred, Leonard! neither in thought, word or deed, can any thing of the kind be laid to my charge. You know my poor affectionate simple-hearted girl—you have often seen her in private—did the remotest hint of any such thing ever fall from her?”

“Never—never. She is the most self-devoted victim of love I ever beheld, or could have imagined.”

“For pity’s sake, do not talk of her in a light that tortures my very soul to reflect on! but tell me in the name of heaven what can have put thoughts so injurious to me into your head!”

“I received a letter before my departure from Dublin—”

“ From Helen ? ”

“ No—from a rascally Irish black-guard.”

“ My dear Leonard!—what, in God’s name, could that have to do with me ? ”

“ He states his wife to be a relation of Helen’s—and witness to some transaction of a ring—”

“ An impudent attempt to squeeze a sum of money from you, depend upon it ! ”

“ Aye—so far is plain enough ; he fairly says a sum of money might purchase silence.”

“ As I hope to be saved, Leonard, there is no silence to purchase.”

“ Here is his cursed scrawl—will you read it ? ”

“ It’s a name I never heard of,” looking at the signature, and glancing his eye over the letter. “ Be assured, it is not worth bestowing a thought upon.”

“ So I had determined to treat it, and accordingly took no notice of the letter ;

but the rascal found his way to me next day, and said his wife was Helen's aunt, and her name Mackay."

"That was the name, sure enough, of the artful devil on whom poor Helen seemed dependent when I became acquainted with her; but this evidently proves it a fetch to obtain money."

"He asserted the circumstance of a ring—"

"I never was possessed of one—nor do I believe Helen is—from knowing my foolish dislike to them; so it is not even a well imagined contrivance."

"I hope, from my soul, it may prove nothing more; but I swear I could not help being staggered at last; though to him I professed resolute disbelief—till he insisted upon bringing his wife; and she was so circumstantial—and so eager to take any oath I could require, to the truth of her assertions—"

"*She* would not stick at any oath that might answer her purpose; but what

circumstances did she pretend to state then?"

"That in the presence of herself, her former husband, and Helen's maid, you had put a wedding ring upon Helen's finger, and proclaimed her your wife—"

"It's false as hell!" interrupted Lord Cranmore, now worked up to a fit of passion very unusual to him.

"The woman referred to Helen herself for the truth of the assertion; and added, if *she* did not know how to assert her right, now that you were going to marry another, she had relations that would do it for her; unless silenced by such a consideration as her husband had alluded to in the letter."

The unconscious Lord Cranmore adhered to the conviction in his own mind of the falsehood; but he felt the necessity of making the matter clear as day, and he said with much emotion, "There is a very simple mode, though a very distressing one, of putting it beyond a doubt. I

will write to poor Helen—she is truth itself; and I owe it to the lovely woman I hope shortly to call mine, to leave not the shadow of a doubt upon an assertion like this; this must involve another cruel delay; but there is no knowing how far they may attempt to carry their machinations—and I will not see my Emily, till I am armed with complete refutation.”

And he instantly set about the painful task; leaving his brother wholly at a loss what to think; but satisfied with having got over his own difficulty at least, in the communication, which had dwelt heavily upon his mind.

CHAP. XIII.

THE proposed gentleness of disclosure to Emily, was thwarted in a way that had not been anticipated.

Colonel Maxwell had a valet, who was a devoted admirer of the fair sex, and Mademoiselle Victoire, who could not be long without discovering this weakness, availed herself of it ; sparing no pains to secure her conquest. A tender correspondence ensued, where ‘raptures’ and ‘racks,’ and ‘the Gods’ and ‘Cupid’ were blended, with every little circumstance that either could pick up, relative to their master’s concerns ; an attention to each other’s taste, in which neither of them

were by any means deficient. On the present occasion, zeal to furnish his beloved with a tale of more than common interest, had prompted Westall, after introducing the old Scotch woman to her private interview with his master, to take his own station in the apartment of Henry Villars ; which was only divided by a wooden partition from that in which the distressing tale had been unfolded ; and where enough of it accordingly found its way to his ears to furnish out in his next letter some part of the truth, with fillings up and suppositions of his own ; all imparted under the seal of strict secrecy. But, unfortunately, Victoire's very limited knowledge of the language, joined to the very eager desire of making herself of consequence, induced her, as soon as she made out that something very dreadful and horrible had happened, which she could not clearly comprehend, to have recourse to *Madame Kattee*, in confidence upon the occasion.

Poor Katty's hair stood an end at what she read; and the letter dropped from her hand as she finished it, in all the horror of discovering, that it had clearly come to light, Lord Cranmore had deserted and administered slow poison to his first wife; but not having patience to wait for the completion of its effects, had sworn her to secrecy, and was now making a victim of Emily, and perhaps, like another Blue-beard, preparing a similar fate for her; indeed the narrative was so interlarded with conjecture and misapprehension, that a clearer head than Katty's might have been bewildered with it—no wonder, therefore, her poor brain was completely unsettled; the greater surprise was, that she had sufficient presence of mind left, to consider the importance of saving Emily from the too abrupt knowledge of it. Having enjoined Victoire to the strictest secrecy, she prudently determined to confine herself to her own room for the evening, as a

security against betraying what would, she was sure, go near to destroy her niece.

So far, nothing could be better, and more unlike her usual proceedings.

When sent for, to come down to tea, she returned for answer, ‘that she found herself very unwell, and desired to be excused for the evening.’ Emily, alarmed at this message, only stopped long enough to give her father his tea, before she repaired to her aunt’s apartment, to inquire into the nature of her disorder.

There, indeed, she found her in disorder enough; pacing her room—wringing her hands—ejaculating—calling down vengeance upon the whole wicked race of man! Emily stood aghast—she thought sudden phrenzy had seized her.

“My dear aunt! what can be the matter?—do compose yourself!”

“The matter! don’t ask me! don’t, for goodness sake! *you* of all people, my

poor dear child ! oh, you'll know it all but too soon, God help you !”

Emily now conceiving some misfortune to have befallen the travellers, became dreadfully alarmed, and entreated to know the worst !

“ Impossible, my dear ! impossible ! I never can bring myself to inflict such a wound upon your tender heart ! no, never shall you know it from me ! oh, who could have suspected him ! he, of all people upon earth, to turn out a villain !”

Now aware that it was Lord Cranmore she was inveighing against, Emily naturally concluded Katty had got hold of some vague report respecting Mrs. Sidney ; and she entered upon the explanation he had given to Mrs. Villars ; but her aunt, thrown wholly off her guard by finding something had transpired, interrupted her precipitately, “ Mercy defend us ! my poor dear child ! how shockingly you are deceived ! why she comes out to be his

true and lawful wife! and has confessed it all.—I've seen the letter—”

Emily faintly stammered out, “ This must be misrepresentation—”

Which led Katty to prove her assertion by reference to the letter, from which she quoted without mercy, all she could recollect, as well as much that probably was not to be found in it. She might have gone on without interruption for any length of time—her auditor sat without sense or motion—the conviction had flashed upon her mind, that whatever exaggeration there might be in these representations, the suddenness of Mrs. Villars and Sophia's departure for Aberystwith was clearly connected with it; and their concealment of the motive, left no doubt of its being a distressing one.

Katty, terrified at her appearance, flew to the bell with violence, and then ran screaming to the stair-head for help; “she believed Emily was dying.” This quickly brought Miss Maxwell to her assistance,

who no sooner understood the cause of her friend's apparent stupefaction, than she applied herself, by commiserating soothings, to endeavour to bring her to tears ; and when she at length succeeded in this, she proceeded to communicate the actual circumstances imparted by the Colonel. The first words that broke from Emily were, " May he stand acquitted to his own conscience ! I can bear to be bereaved of any thing but my opinion of him ! "

" Be assured he will not forfeit it ! " exclaimed Miss Maxwell. " I would stake my life upon his honour ! "

Emily's tears now flowed freely and plentifully ; and with fervent piety, she raised her supplicating eyes for support, where they had never yet been raised in vain.

Meanwhile, the total inability of Mr. Villars to move out of his chair, left him in a state of fearful agitation, till the repeated summons of his bell, brought

Katty herself to account for the alarm she had given ; but her narrative was not calculated to quiet his irritated nerves, and a far different effect was produced here from the scene above stairs ; the rage of the incensed father knew no bounds ; and wholly insensible to the pain of his gouty limb, he started on his feet—vowed vengeance on Lord Cranmore, in a paroxysm of fury—which, however, was quickly checked by its own violence—for it produced a spasm in the stomach, that caused him to fall back into his chair, in an agony which would soon have proved fatal, but for the housekeeper's having at this moment come fortunately within hearing ; and by instantly resorting to the cordials administered in cases of alarm, she was the means of saving her master's life ; for as to poor Katty, she seemed rooted by terror to the spot she stood on ; and only by her screams gave any token of remaining sense. She soon became an object of solicitude herself ; for a fever

actually ensued upon the various emotions she had undergone ; and to have beheld the meek resignation and self-possession with which Emily nursed and comforted her, for the mischief she had occasioned ; no uninformed spectator could possibly have conjectured *her*, to be the deep sufferer from these distressing occurrences.

Mr. Villars became somewhat calmer by the inspection of Colonel Maxwell's letter, which Marianne now imparted to him ; still, however, the conduct of Lord Cranmore remained in so doubtful a light, that he determined to put the investigation into the hands of his son, and obliged Miss Maxwell to write under his dictation to Henry, enjoining him to repair instantly to London, and obtain from Lord Cranmore the elucidation of this incomprehensible affair.

Mrs. Villars's letter to Miss Maxwell now came to awaken deep interest in the cause of Helen ; and in no bosom did it work more forcibly than in that of the

generous Emily. Confirmed by Miss Maxwell in her entire reliance upon Lord Cranmore's noble nature; satisfied that he must have been unconsciously, however unaccountably to all appearance, entangled, she exclaimed with fervour, "O! that my powers of persuasion may prove efficacious to induce him to restore this deluded victim of enthusiastic feeling to the character and station in society that is her just due!"

"Is it possible, Emily!" cried Miss Maxwell, "you can be equal to such a heroic sacrifice of your own happiness?"

"There is no heroism, Marianne, in foregoing what could no longer deserve that name; however unconsciously he may have been drawn in, there is but one course for him to take, the instant his eyes shall have been opened; and that I shall forcibly urge, if the poor girl herself cannot be brought to explain it. I shall only wait to see the issue of my mother's efforts with her. Meanwhile, there is no

danger of his coming hither, while Sir Edward's situation continues so precarious: to see him, might indeed enhance the difficulty of my task, though I trust nothing could shake my determination."

But Emily was saved from this severe trial of her fortitude; Helen's answer to Lord Cranmore, although no able scribe, was sufficiently explicit.

This was her letter:

' So solemnly called upon, I must speak the truth. Sidney, the fact is so! but you were not yourself at the time; they intoxicated you with base and wicked art, to betray you into an act which in your understanding you would not have done.—Me they deceived also. I thought that what we did was their frolic only. I had no thought of its having power to bind you. When I knew that, there is no power on earth could have made me use that claim upon you; but indeed, I never wished it; I was contented with your love.

‘ Sidney, I did then think myself your wife ; but I had no desire for the world to know it. I would not have them. I knew well I was not worthy of you : never, when I was most happy, was the presumptuous thought in my heart to be your known acknowledged wife.

‘ My happiness soon fled. Then, not for worlds should I have told that fatal secret. You were free. I thought you should be happy as you deserved, and I should carry my secret with me into the grave.

‘ That was my purpose a long while, till I considered what should become of my children ; it was terrible to think that dishonour should rest upon their names. Then I resolved I should leave a faithful written memorial of that which had passed, which at my death would be sent to you, that you might acknowledge your children.

‘ Oh ! what was I doing ? I would have destroyed your happiness for ever : but I am saved from that fatal error, I thank

heaven, which has sent me light. Angels have crossed my path, and have shown me things I had never conceived of before. They made me understand how blindly I was now acting in my purpose towards you, and that this discovery coming too late, should surely blast life to you, and to her whom you have chosen.

‘ I have now therefore made this acknowledgment to you tho’ most unwillingly, for now must I be the bar to your happiness, for which I would die ; but it will not be long, Sidney. For some time past has my life been fast decaying, and lately I have received a very severe shock, since when I think it is hastening to its close.

‘ Forgive me that I delay your happy hour. May it come to bring you happiness ! may you be happy, Sidney ! It has been my first, my only wish, since I knew you—It shall be my last.

‘ HELEN.’

Every particle of generosity, as well as of honour, in the breast of Lord Cranmore was roused by this letter; and how much more still of admiration would he have felt to be poor Helen's due, could he have appreciated the forbearance that checked every allusion to the present penitent state of her mind; for fully was her compunction now awakened, and deeply sensible had she become of her errors; but she was incapable of increasing his distress by any appeal to his compassion.

Without one moment's hesitation, however, he resolved to obey the imperious dictates of duty; and whilst his travelling carriage was getting ready to take him straight to Aberystwith, he wrote these few words to Emily:

‘ A circumstance the most unforeseen takes me far from the happiness I had in view. I most earnestly entreat you to suspend all judgment, till I can fully

detail my motives from Wales, whither I am now compelled to go. The sacrifice I feel myself bound to make, is the strongest claim I can lay to the continuation of your esteem. To whatever fate I may now condemn myself, be assured my feelings towards you must continue unaltered to the last hour of my existence.

CRANMORE.'

'P. S. I leave my brother Leonard in charge of Arundel.'

Emily was at no loss to construe the full import of these scarcely legible lines. She honoured him more than ever, for the promptness of a resolution which she knew how to appreciate, for she knew how ardently she was beloved. He was nobly and freely making the sacrifice to which she had turned all the strength of her mind to urge him; had he shrunk from it, she must have esteemed him less. Soon, however, a deeper sadness stole into her soul: she had lost the

support she had unconsciously derived from the pride of setting him the example of disinterestedness ; and she sunk into a state of wretchedness, that well nigh overpowered her faculties.

She did not fail to seek in the retirement of her closet, a better and more permanent stay, than pride can ever lend ; and the fervour with which she incessantly turned to it, obtained sooner than could almost have been hoped for, the resignation necessary to save her from sinking under the blow.

It was to the rapid increase of confidential intercourse with Mrs. Villars, that Helen owed the new light in which she now viewed her past conduct ; every avenue to her heart was opened by the kindness with which she was treated ; delicacy had in the first instance kept Mrs. Villars from urging for farther disclosures ; but Helen soon ceased to have a wish for concealment, and the

conversations that ensued, gave rise to very new views indeed, in her simple uninstructed mind. Great was her astonishment when made to understand the injury she would have occasioned to the unconscious Emily, by the concealment she had imposed upon herself. Her whole soul engrossed by one single object—solicitude for Sidney's happiness—she had never reflected upon the consequences of the testimonials that must establish her children's claims to legitimacy, which of course must have annulled Emily's marriage, as having taken place during her life. She offered up a fervent thanksgiving to the throne of mercy, for having been spared, by the fortuitous meeting with Henry Villars, from thus unintentionally blasting the very purpose, to which she was making so great a sacrifice.

Still she adhered to her generous forbearance with respect to herself; and did

not impart the letter she received from Lord Cranmore, till after she had answered it, lest Mrs. Villars should have urged her to make the appeal to his compassion, from which it was her firm resolution to refrain.

CHAP. XIV.

THE letter Mr. Villars had caused to be written to his son, neither found him unprepared nor unwilling to obey its mandate. From the moment Mrs. Villars had discovered the positive bar to her daughter's marriage, she had imparted the circumstance to Henry, in the hope of checking by her arguments the very interference his father was so eager to urge. Henry's mind was distracted by the various interests that filled it: his friendship for Lord Cranmore—his fraternal affection—the wrongs of the hapless Helen—the interest of the lovely children—all pulled different ways; and his

perplexity was at its utmost height, when his father's letter came, to fix his mode of proceeding, leaving him no other option than that of substituting every mild persuasion that heart or sense could suggest, to the peremptory tone recommended to him by his irritated parent. Unwilling to alarm his mother with the idea of what might occur, he cautiously suppressed the reception of the letter ; and availed himself of the circumstance of a communication made by Mr. Valacort to Sophia, as a blind for his purpose.

Mr. Valacort wrote word that the early meeting of parliament had called him to town, and his wife's continued sufferings from her arm had induced her to accompany him, which put it in their power to offer Sophia the means of being at hand to watch the first moment of Sir Edward's convalescence that might admit of her seeing him ; this was most eagerly caught at by Sophia, who, now she was no longer upheld by the

consciousness of contributing to the restoration of Helen's peace of mind (which seemed to have devolved wholly upon Mrs. Villars) had for some days been sinking into a state of extreme discomfort, at feeling herself so much farther removed from the object of her tenderest solicitude. She instantly determined upon setting off next morning, and Henry made the plea of taking care of his sister his ostensible motive for accompanying her. Mrs. Villars felt no anxiety as to any farther intentions he might have, as the solemnity that marked Lord Cranmore's letter to Helen led her to anticipate the step that Helen's answer would produce.

In the midst of the preparations for their departure at an early hour next morning, Agatha came running in breathless from her evening walk, to say, there was a ship in danger, and the people all crowding to the beach, and boats going to get the passengers out of her; no more

was necessary to impel both brother and sister to speed to the scene of distress, with the offers of any assistance they might afford to the rescued sufferers. And how was Sophia's ever ready zeal to succour the unfortunate rewarded beyond her utmost hopes, when in the very first person landed from the boat she recognized Mrs. Fitzclare !

Faint with fatigue and fright, and perfectly drenched, she had scarce power to throw herself into Sophia's arms, in agitation too mighty for speech. Anxious to convey her without loss of time to her lodgings, Sophia left to Henry the care of the remaining sufferers, and hastened on with her almost helpless charge, whom the servant (sent after her by Mrs. Villars, as the alarm had spread) was assisting her to support ; when they were met by Agatha holding a hand of each of the little Sidneys. Mrs. Fitzclare's eye falling from Agatha upon the little girl, she exclaimed with a wild scream—

“ Merciful heaven ! do I see the living image of my lost child ?—oh ! who are you ? ”

“ Helen Sidney,” said the child.

Mrs. Fitzclare uttered an hysterical laugh, and fainted away.

The truth darted at once into Sophia’s mind. The circumstance of Mrs. Sidney’s being indeed the long lost object of Mrs. Fitzclare’s fruitless research, had been so entirely kept out of sight, by the variations in Helen’s account of herself, from the narrative imparted at the Priory by her mother, that this idea had never occurred.

Sensible of the extreme importance in Helen’s delicate state, that the discovery should not be too abruptly made, she enjoined the strictest silence to the children upon what had happened ; and with the servant’s help was endeavouring to carry the fainting woman forward ; when Janet, who had been left behind by the rapidity with which the young ones

had run on, came up ; and seeing something the matter, was beginning with an offer of her assistance, till the sight of Mrs. Fitzclare's inanimate countenance called forth a frantic shriek of " The wraith! the wraith!—oh, my blessed mistress !"

" For mercy's sake, command yourself, Janet !" cried Sophia ; " it is her very self !"

The poor old woman, with a desperate energy and strength beyond what she could have been expected to possess, raised her in her arms, and ran on with her at so extraordinary a pace, that Sophia, not aware of her intention, had scarce sufficient quickness to save her taking her at once to Mrs. Sidney ; and so bewildered were her senses, that it was with difficulty she was brought to comprehend the danger to which she would have exposed both mother and daughter.

In Mrs. Villars's lodgings she was now

however deposited; and Colonel Maxwell having taken charge of the children, the old woman was sent off in quest of the surgeon, as the most likely mode of giving her time to recover the use of her faculties.

Mrs. Fitzclare had been so completely spent with fright and fatigue, before this sudden revulsion occurred, that she fell from one fainting fit into another, during the evening and night; never recovering sufficient consciousness between them for any explanation.

Sophia's departure was now of course postponed. She did not leave Mrs. Fitzclare's bedside; and Mrs. Villars next day undertook the critical task of preparing poor Helen for the important disclosure. It required all her caution, for the slightest agitation was almost more than her enfeebled frame could support.

Helen scarce knew whether joy or dread was the predominant feeling of her

mind on the discovery. All traces of her mother had been obliterated from her earliest childhood, in the belief of her death; her own conduct had been calculated to tinge her parent's cheek with the blush of shame. How could she hope again to meet with that tender indulgence, which she did not imagine ever to have existed in any female heart, but those of Mrs. Villars and Mrs. Delmere?

Janet, however, whose tongue was now set at liberty, was eloquent in the praises she had for so many years been precluded from uttering; first by the authoritative prohibition of Captain Fitzclare, and after his death, by her own discretion, averse to excite unavailing regret in the bosom of Helen for a parent she had herself been taught to believe no longer in existence.

Helen soon became fully sensible of the magnitude of the blessing in store for her, and still more for her children, in

the prospect of her mother's recovery ; and she anxiously watched at her bed's head, unperceived by Mrs. Fitzclare, every symptom of the disorder.

After the first day, in which she had once, in the interval of her faintings, exclaimed, " Oh ! was it all a dream ? " the exhausted patient had sunk gradually into a low fever, and appeared unable or unwilling to speak.

Sophia, notwithstanding the dearest interests of her heart called her to London, was desirous to stay with her poor friend till she could see her safe from the effects of the recognition with her daughter ; but Henry, eager to obey his father's injunctions, and satisfy his own anxious solicitude, pressed her departure ; and another letter from Mr. Valacort coming in aid of his persuasions, stating the impatience of Sir Edward Arundel for the arrival of Mrs. Delmere, whom his surgeons were now willing to admit of his seeing, Mrs. Villars gave

the casting vote ; by engaging to remain at Aberystwith till the mother and daughter should be fully restored to each other's society. This removed all farther scruple, and gave Sophia wholly up to her own ardent desire for the interview. Mr. Valacort had strongly dwelt in his letter upon the necessity of preparing Mrs. Delmere for the shock that awaited her, in the entire disfigurement of Sir Edward ; but to this she did not listen for a moment. " Every scar deepens his claim upon my affection !" she cried.

The next morning was again fixed for their departure. In the evening, when she had prevailed with Helen to breathe a little fresh air, she called upon her for an elucidation of the circumstances which had so wholly misled Mrs. Villars and herself.

From these, as far as Helen could clear them up, it soon became evident that Mrs. Fitzclare's reluctance to place her husband's turpitude in its

strongest light, had induced her to suppress many particulars in her narrative which might have opened the eyes of Mrs. Delmere to the coincidence that had escaped her ; and with the whole of which it will now be proper to acquaint the reader, as briefly as may be.

CHAP. XV.

CAPTAIN Fitzclare was an Irish Roman-Catholic in the French service ; whose handsome person, plausible manners, with some creditable military distinction, had gained him an interest in the affections of Miss Carstairs which he did not deserve, for he was profligate and unprincipled.

In consenting to marry him, she had stipulated for training up any daughters she might have, in her own religious tenets : to which he had not objected: But when several years had elapsed without bringing him any other child

than Helen, who was born in the first year of their marriage, he began to entertain wonderful sensibility and fears for the welfare of this only daughter's soul ; not perhaps altogether insincere, since even in the profligacy of his life he retained the early superstitious subjection of his mind to the opinions of his church. As any affection which he might ever have had for his amiable virtuous wife was now entirely at an end ; he was not long in devising a project for rescuing himself from his matrimonial thralldom, and his child from perdition, at one stroke.

The faithful Janet was first sent out of the way to nurse a sick relation of his ; he next received a sudden call to Ireland upon business of importance, and fixed the day for his departure. On the preceding evening, having persuaded his wife to retire early, to leave him to make his arrangements for his journey, which he said would take him best part of the

night, he forthwith repaired to the nursery, took the sleeping child from the servant, whose fidelity he had bribed; conveyed it to the chaise he had in waiting—and neither husband nor child did the unhappy woman ever see more.

He left a letter, ascribing the step to his solicitude for his child's eternal salvation, which he was convinced a separation from its misguided mother could alone ensure, with a promise to restore her when her religious principles should be fixed; meanwhile she might rest satisfied of her safety, under Janet's care, whom he meant to pick up by the way. This he did, and proceeded to Ireland, where he placed his child with the worthless sister, who has been mentioned by the name of Mackay, then married to an Irishman of no better principles than Fitzclare himself. The extraordinary circumstance here was, that poor Helen should have retained the native innocence and simplicity of her mind; and

only become a romantic enthusiast. Preserved probably in a great measure by the honest integrity of her faithful attendant; for little of moral instruction could be obtained from the poor ignorant priest who had taken charge of her eternal welfare.

A small estate devolved to Fitzclare almost immediately upon his arrival in Ireland, to which was annexed the condition of changing his name; in consequence of which, Helen knew herself only by that of O'Bourne; having speedily lost the recollection of ever bearing another, and Janet being prohibited, on pain of dismissal, from acquainting her with it.

Various were the attempts the faithful creature had made to inform her unfortunate mistress of their situation; but her letters were intercepted, till she was at length made to believe that both Mrs. Fitzclare and Mrs. Carstairs were dead; and the farce was gone through

with, by her master putting both himself and Helen into mourning.

On the other hand, Mrs. Fitzclare remained ignorant of her husband's inheritance and change of name; he had resigned his commission in the French army almost immediately, and soon dropped all correspondence. His money was rapidly squandered in his profligate pleasures, and he at length came to the very common end, of being killed in a duel, the consequence of a drunken broil.

The circumstance only became known to Mrs. Fitzclare, years after it had occurred, through the channel of an old newspaper that accidentally fell into her hands, and in which happened to be specified his original name and station in the French service.

The wretched parent again made an attempt to obtain some information respecting her child, all her former ones having been baffled by his interference. But his sister, to whom she applied, had in

the interim become a widow, married Mackay, and removed with him to Edinburgh, taking her niece with her; consequently the letter remained unanswered, and the hapless mother continued in a state of uncertainty, that went near to unsettle her reason; the age and infirmities of Mrs. Carstairs precluding all thought either of moving or leaving her.

At length, accident so far favoured her, that the address of her letter stuck up in the window of the post office, attracted the attention of a relation of her late husband's; who having had the curiosity to make himself master of the contents, officiously took the trouble to inform her of her daughter's removal with her aunt to Edinburgh, where her beauty had captivated a young man, named Sidney, who had taken her into keeping, and carried her away with him to England, but to what part of it he did not know.

A farther application to him from the

distracted mother obtained the intelligence, that Mr. Sidney had settled her in a cottage, in the Isle of Wight.

No consideration could now prevent the old grandmother from running all risks to accompany Mrs. Fitzclare to the Isle of Wight; and they set out accordingly, but their search was fruitless: a family of that name had inhabited a cottage in the under cliff, but had left it some time, and whither they were gone was not known; the description given, however, of the old Scotch servant, satisfied them it was the object of their anxiety who had been there; and they now determined upon taking a lodging at Southampton till they could devise what might best be done: but the expensive living had driven them farther inland; first, into the neighbourhood of Winchester, and then towards Andover, till they had finally got to the farmhouse where we originally found them.

Mrs. Fitzclare had applied to some of her Scotch connexions for advice how to proceed; they could suggest nothing better than a newspaper advertisement.

Which having proved ineffectual, probably owing to Lord Cranmore's absence from England at the time, they determined to pursue their way to Scotland by sea. There the old lady being amongst her own relations, her daughter would be more at liberty to make any necessary personal exertions for the attainment of her object; and they were accordingly on the point of setting out, when the severe gouty seizure of Mrs. Carstairs came in the way, detained them for some time longer, and gave occasion for their acquaintance with the Villars's.

When they finally reached Edinburgh, the Mackays had left it, and they could obtain no clue to guide them. Some recollected to have seen the pretty Helen; some had heard of her being

carried off by a young student ; but the aunt moved in too middling a sphere of life to have been the object of much attention ; and the heart-riven mother, still clinging to a last possible chance, had resolved to cross to Ireland before fulfilling her engagement with Mrs. Delmere, but was again stopped by the increased illness of Mrs. Carstairs.

The poor old lady's final release set her at liberty to pursue her search to Dublin. It proved as fruitless as ever, and she had embarked for England, when stress of weather drove her thus providentially on the Welch coast.

Of Mrs. Carstairs' death, and the subsequent attempt in Ireland, Mrs. Fitzclare had given notice ; but of her intended departure from thence, the intelligence had not reached Sophia, when she so unexpectedly received her in her arms.

The change of name, and Helen's ignorance of the first years of her life (for

she was scarcely five when her father carried her off) together with her entire conviction of her mother's death, sufficiently account for the variations in her own and her mother's narrative, which had kept Mrs. Villars and Sophia so completely in the dark, as to her identity with the object of Mrs. Fitzclare's research.

Little Helen Sidney's resemblance to what her mother had been at her age, as well as the name she gave herself, which seemed to stamp her mother's degradation ; produced the mixture of overcoming sensations that Mrs. Fitzclare's already exhausted frame was unable to sustain.

Helen could not detail all the circumstances as succinctly as they are here related, because she only obtained her information from Janet since the arrival of her mother at Aberystwith ; but Sophia being previously in possession of Fitzclare's story, connected it sufficiently

to induce her to spend part of the night previous to her departure in making the communication to her sister ; ardently wishing to excite such an interest as might in some degree reconcile the ill-fated Emily to the sacrifice, for which she was now called upon ; but carefully refraining from suggesting the violent measure her own romantic disposition would have prompted. Had the case been hers, she knew she should have rushed with enthusiastic devotion to the conflict, be the consequences what they might ! but Emily's mind was not formed for such heroic deeds—she must be spared—she would sink under the trial ; it was important, therefore, to suppress every allusion to the benefit that might accrue to Mrs. Villars and Helen from her presence, and with a caution not very usual to Sophia, the letter was worded.

But Emily was not the person to spare herself. Far other motives ! would have impelled *her* instantly to take the very

step that despair would have suggested to Sophia. She saw the great use she might be of at Aberystwith, and was thoroughly aware, from the tenor of Lord Cranmore's letter, of the honourable part he was about to act ; but she was withheld by the reflection, that her presence might increase his struggles. She believed she knew what she herself could bear, under the consciousness of performing a duty ; she knew not so well what his firmness might be : there was, moreover, an appearance of indelicacy, in forcing herself into his presence. She determined to remain where she was.

Sophia and Henry had, as they intended, taken the wings of the morning ; and spurred on by her impatience, they sped their way, not meaning to stop night or day, till they should reach Stanhope Street. As they drew up to Chapel House to change horses, their servant came to the chaise door with a scared look, and said he had seen a servant of

Lord Cranmore's in the inn-yard, who told him his Lord had been dangerously hurt by an overturn, and was confined to his bed in that house.

It may be imagined that Henry lost not a moment in jumping out of the chaise, and seeking more particular information. He learnt that Lord Cranmore was travelling towards Wales with all the speed four horses could lend, when the axle-tree of the carriage gave way, with a violence so sudden, as to have caused a contusion on Lord Cranmore's head that had produced insensibility; the nearest medical assistance had been obtained, with all possible speed, and the most effectual remedies applied, but hitherto without success; he remained insensible.

Henry's alarm at this account was so strongly pictured in his countenance, as instantly to determine Sophia to insist upon leaving him there, to watch over Lord Cranmore, and proceed to London

by herself. Friendship at this moment silencing every other consideration, he agreed to let his sister proceed without him, and remain by his friend's bedside, to secure every possible care being taken; greatly fearing, from the appearance of the contusion, and the continued stupor, that all might prove fruitless. He only entreated his sister to stop in Oxford, till she could dispatch the best physician from thence, which she accordingly did.

Henry's first business was to inform Colonel Maxwell of this misfortune; he then wrote to Miss Maxwell likewise; begging her to impart so much as she might judge prudent, to Emily, of what had happened; scarcely doubting, but that worse must follow, for which he wished her to be prepared.

With every possible caution, Miss Maxwell proceeded in the painful disclosure. Emily could not for a moment be deceived as to the extent of the danger; she well knew it was not a trifling

hurt that her brother would so carefully have imparted. Her grief—her feelings may be imagined, far more easily than the surprising strength of mind with which, after the first forty-eight hours, she turned her thoughts to the expediency of flying to the succour of Helen, lest the worst should take place. The continuance of the stupor which Henry's subsequent letter acknowledged ; and the certainty derived from that circumstance of the length of time, at best, that must elapse before Lord Cranmore could be suffered to move, set aside all apprehension of meeting him, and she resolutely made up her mind to the journey.

Miss Maxwell, sensible of the benefit of exertion in grief so deep as that which had now taken possession of her friend, encouraged the plan, as well by undertaking to solicit Mr. Villars's consent to his daughter's proposal, as by engaging to take her place in nursing his gout.

His acquiescence was more ready than had been expected ; as his resentment for the supposed ill-treatment of Emily made the apprehension of Lord Cranmore's death sit very light upon his own mind, he did not exactly estimate her sufferings what they actually were ; and at the time of Miss Maxwell's application to him, his attention being moreover wholly engrossed by an able pamphlet on the state of the nation, he caught no more of her explanation, than that Mrs. Villars wanted her daughter at Aberystwith, which, he said, " of course she ought immediately to comply with ; and if she would delay her departure for a few hours, he should have gone through the pamphlet, and she might take it with her for her mother's perusal, as it would be highly pleasing to her, to see how many of the arguments were exactly what she had so frequently heard him state." Miss Maxwell, satisfied with having so readily obtained his consent,

neither stopped to clear up Emily's motives, nor yet to remind him how small a share the subject of politics occupied in Mrs. Villars's thoughts, but sent off without loss of time for Patty Benson to accompany Emily ; and a very few hours saw her on her road to Wales.

CHAP. XVI.

LEAVE we the piously resigned though deeply sorrowing Emily, to win her weary way ; while we attend the rapid course of Sophia : who, on her arrival in Stanhope Street found herself so nearly exhausted with fatigue and anxiety, as to be wholly unfit to see the object of her ardent solicitude that evening. At least Mrs. Valacort so strongly urged this plea, as to bear down all opposition ; secretly impelled by her sense of the importance of preparing her niece as much as possible for the trying spectacle she was about to witness.

Sophia believed herself prepared.

But far short indeed, did her expectation fall of the pallid, emaciated powerless figure, she next morning saw, stretched upon his sofa, his face half concealed by the bandages, and with scarcely sufficient strength to raise his languid head from the cushions, in acknowledgment of her presence.

She stood transfixed.

He clasped his raised hands in testimony of his joy on beholding her, and a beam of pleasure lighted up his eyes as they rested on her countenance ; but he could not immediately speak.

“ Merciful God ! ” she exclaimed ;
“ And is this my doing ? ” gazing upon him in uncontrouled emotion.

“ Oh no !—no—it was my zeal to deserve the blessing—and this condescension—”

He spoke with difficulty and somewhat inarticulately : she interrupted him—

“ O ! do not miscall it condescension !

how can I ever make sufficient reparation for these consequences of my self-willed headstrong folly ?”

“ By suffering this poor maimed and crippled form, to bask occasionally in the sunshine of your smiles—that is all I now shall ever dare—”

Again interrupting him, she impetuously exclaimed, “ Sir Edward ! you have declared your existence devoted to me. I here devote mine to you ! and heaven so prosper me, as every hour of my future life shall be consecrated to the care of your happiness !”

And she sunk upon her knees, as with uplifted hands and eyes, she fervently uttered this vow.

“ Noble ! exalted woman !” he cried, in the extremest agitation ; “ Never—never will I abuse generosity so unparalleled !”

His increasing pallidness showed him near fainting ; and Mr. Valacort, who

was the spectator of this scene, interposed.

His attendants were summoned, and Sophia was almost forcibly dragged out of the room, but out of the house she would not go, till she was satisfied of his being again restored to some degree of calmness. Mr. Preston, who had foreseen that the interview, whenever it occurred, must be attended with strong emotion, had remained in the parlour ; and having succeeded in quieting his patient's returning senses, by promising him another sight of Mrs. Delmere in the evening ; she suffered herself, on receiving this intelligence, to be prevailed on to return home.

She employed the intermediate hours in convincing Mr. and Mrs. Valacort, that no persuasions they could urge, nor any power on earth, should now deter her from giving her hand immediately to Sir Edward, as the only means of sanctioning the unremitting attendance she was henceforth determined to pay him ; and

Mr. Valacort was finally induced to undertake obtaining the special licence, which should, on the following morning, empower her to establish herself head nurse, and secure to this victim of her wrong-headedness all those minor comforts and reliefs at least, which female heads and hands are alone competent to administer.

The evening scene was a repetition of the disinterested contest of the morning. Sir Edward, renovated and soothed by sentiments so congenial to the most exalted idea he had formed of the object of his unbounded adoration, yet feared that excess of compassion and self-reproach might at this moment prompt a sacrifice she would afterwards repent; and with a generosity worthy of her own, he resisted securing to himself the only happiness for which he had any wish to live.

But he yet knew not Sophia. Compassion and self-reproach, she assuredly experienced in no common degree; but

the predominating feeling of her mind was the enthusiastic admiration he had excited in it, by his self-denying forbearance in regard to Patty ; when one word of explanation to open her eyes to the profligacy of Delmere would have ensured him the attainment of all his wishes. Her heart was from the moment of that discovery, wedded to his by ties that his death only could have prevented her from ratifying.

And the next morning's sun rose upon the accomplishment of their union, under circumstances as extraordinary as the extraordinary beings who contracted it.

In the course of the day, Lady Arundel's apartment in Brook Street was fitted up with all the elegance and splendour that Lord Leonard Ormsby's taste could impart ; for he had been commissioned to exert it without limitation, and every one knows how abundantly London furnishes the means. But what were splendour and elegance to her !

her station during the day was by the side of her husband's sofa—her mind wholly intent upon contrivances for his ease and comfort; at night she occupied a couch she had caused to be placed in his room, insisting upon the nurse, who watched by his bedside, calling her whenever medicines were to be given, which she would not suffer to be administered by any hand but her own. Nor was it long before the salutary effects became evident, of the peaceful and tranquil enjoyment imparted by beholding this lovely and beloved form ever flitting in his sight, about his path and about his bed.—*Path* alas! was yet but a figure of speech; the limb which had been rescued from amputation remained in a state of extreme uncertainty, as to its ever again bearing his weight; and the incessant exfoliations from the jaw, admitting only of liquid food taken through a silver tube, gave but a distant prospect, if any, of again resuming its functions.

These untoward appearances had not served to reconcile Mrs. Valacort to Sophia's view of the matter ; she did not scruple to pronounce it all highly romantic, and somewhat absurd. She had in the first instance wasted many hours, and all her rhetoric, in the vain attempt to convince her niece that there could be no reasonable claim upon her to tie herself down to leading about an invalid for the remainder of her days ; any thing short of that, might be proper enough ; but she could assure those to whom she mentioned it, that the step by no means met her approbation ; although her niece had over-persuaded her to give it the sanction of her presence, she really could consider it in no better light than as bordering upon madness.

Lord Leonard Ormsby had only given himself time to provide for Lady Arundel's comforts, when he set out for Chapel-house, to partake in Henry's anxious

attendance upon his still unconscious friend.

Emily took no rest upon her road ; and completed her journey before Miss Maxwell's letter arrived to inform Mrs. Villars of its having been undertaken.

Astonishment is too feeble a word to convey any idea of the mixed distressing sensations with which Mrs. Villars beheld her darling Emily alight from her chaise, with that sad look of heartfelt grief which pervaded every feature.

“ Merciful heaven, my child !” she exclaimed ; “ what can have prompted your taking this trying journey ?”

“ I could not bear to leave you alone, dearest mother, to such a fearful variety of care as the unhappy Helen and Mrs. Fitzclare must require.”

“ Surely, surely, *you* are unfit, Emily, for what you are undertaking—you seem half dead with fatigue already.”

She was, in fact, scarce able to support

herself when she alighted. "A little rest will soon recover me," she said; "I could not remain inactive in the tortured state of my mind."

Mrs. Villars, unwilling to let her exhaust herself by farther conversation, led the way to Sophia's apartment, of which she put her in possession, with a strong injunction to Patty to let nothing disturb her there before the next morning; determining at the same time, to defer the communication of her arrival to Helen, till the following day. Very apprehensive of the effect the news would produce, she determined to take the breaking of it upon herself.

But 'prudence proposes, and circumstance disposes.'

Helen, whose unceasing attendance in her mother's chamber seemed effectually to secure her against hearing of an event so agitating, happened to be the first person informed of it. Janet's curiosity, excited by the arrival of the

chaise, brought her within reach of the servant's voice, as he uttered an exclamation of surprise on beholding his young lady step out of it. It may naturally be supposed that the attached old woman's feelings were not likely to be very tender towards any of the Villars family, who she considered as the destroyers of her dear bairn's fame, as well as closing her every prospect of happiness in this world. She had not, however, resisted the softening influence of Mrs. Villars and Mrs. Delmere's excessive kindness to Helen; and could find in her heart to wish well to them, in any way that was unconnected with her mistress; but for Emily, she treasured up undiminished her entire stock of wrath and hatred. Some rumours had found their way to her of an expectation of Lord Cranmore's arrival, from which she had formed hopes—although she had preserved a cautious silence in the fear of agitating Helen; but the unlooked-for appearance of Miss

Villars herself, come, as she supposed, to impede whatever better intentions his Lordship might be cherishing, now raised up such a storm of indignation in her breast, as wholly overpowered every other consideration; and running straight to her lady, she burst forth in all the bitterness of her spirit to tell her the news, and reprobate "the cruelty and wickedness of yon witch, just come to cast her evil eye upon him!"

Helen, whose enthusiasm for every part of the Villars family, was worked up to its highest pitch, was too much provoked at Janet's invectives, to attend to her allusion respecting Lord Cranmore's arrival, and angrily imposed silence upon her enraged informant, expressing at the same time her impatience for an interview.

Janet, somewhat sulkily, withdrew—the day passed on, and no notice whatever was taken of the subject that filled Helen's thoughts. It now occurred to

her, that the communication might be withheld from motives of delicacy; for it has been seen, that however untutored her mind, generosity and delicacy were its prevailing features; and she could perfectly understand what she had so undeviatingly (according to her own romantic conceptions) adhered to. She therefore determined to seek without farther loss of time, what did not seem to be so soon intended to be offered, and on leaving her mother's apartment, she repaired to Mrs. Villars.

“You fear to impart your happiness in the sight of your daughter to me, Mrs. Villars,” she began; “do you think me so ungrateful, that you can have any feelings, in which I will not take a share?”

Mrs. Villars, taken by surprise, was for a moment rather embarrassed. Emily's motives for coming could not be touched upon; Helen was ignorant both of Lord Cranmore's being on his

way to her, and of his accident; the precipitation with which he had set out having prevented his writing: and those so deeply interested in his intentions, having as yet only presumption to go upon, could not allow themselves to awaken hopes, which might eventually prove fallacious, nor were they willing to excite an alarm for his safety that would so greatly distress her; perfect silence had therefore been preserved till circumstances should farther develop themselves.

Mrs. Villars, with a little hesitation, said, "Believe me, I do ample justice both to your feelings and your generosity; but I conceive this meeting may be so very trying, I could gladly have spared it."

"Do you think," she interrupted, "after so many years of forbearance voluntarily imposed upon myself, I will shrink now and become selfish? no indeed—I grieve as much as ever to be

the hindrance to his happiness ; and though you have convinced me of the wickedness of seeking my release from care by neglecting my health as I have done, I would still bless the stroke that took me out of the way. I know, with all I can do, it will not be far distant ; and I am very anxious to see *her* that shall reward his merit. I am more conscious every day I could never deserve him.”

“ I give entire credit to your word, Helen ; and you are a being so uncommon as must not be judged by common rules ; but your bodily powers do not keep pace with the energy of your mind, and I rather fear this interview—”

“ Or is it, perhaps, that Miss Villars has a reluctance ?” she impatiently again interrupted ; “ if so, tell me, and I will never urge my strong wish.”

“ No ; certainly the very reverse—she will be anxious to see you when she can be sure it will not give you pain.”

“Then, dear madam, allow me to go and satisfy her of that, this moment,” said Helen, starting up.

Emily’s fatigue and want of rest, however, was a very sufficient reason for bridling her impatience till the next day.

At the appointed time on the following morning, Mrs. Villars conducted Helen to Emily’s room.

There was sufficient embarrassment on both sides, to make it difficult for either to speak. Mrs. Villars sought to give time for their recovering from the ideas that so painfully and powerfully occupied them.

“My daughter,” she began, “observed the improved looks of her little acquaintances from Boxmount Cottage, as she passed them yesterday Mrs. Sidney ; and expressed her pleasure in seeing them so perfectly recovered.”

Helen’s eyes filled with tears of gratitude for the kind opening, “It is in-

deed very good in Miss Villars to interest herself in my children !” she replied.

Emily regaining some degree of self-possession, said, “ Their appearance must interest any one that sees them ; but more particularly me, Mrs. Sidney.”

“ O Miss Villars ! with what joy I’ll sink to rest, if I may hope for your goodness to them, when I am out of the way.”

“ I shall be far more gratified, by any kindness I may have the means of showing them, during your lifetime,” returned Emily, with great warmth.

“ O Miss Villars ! you have a heavenly mind joined to every thing else that can make *him* happy. O, that I was but out of the way !” she exclaimed with fervour.

“ You must not encourage such a wish, Mrs. Sidney ! whatever deprivation and suffering you have imposed upon yourself, you owe the utmost care of your health to your lovely children.”

The distress of this interview was considerably increased to Emily by the fear of betraying what she knew of Lord Cranmore.

“You are all sweetness!” cried Helen, “I had a dread of your hating the very sight of me, who stand between you and such great happiness as I now find I must do, whether I will or no.”

“Indeed, Mrs. Sidney, that fear much more properly belongs to me, who have had the misfortune to draw away affections, so justly your due.”

“O no!—O no!” exclaimed the enthusiastic Helen; “I never was worthy of such superhuman excellence as his—he felt that long—long before ever he knew you.”

“The conviction that your separation has not originated with me, is indeed necessary to the recovery of my peace,” returned Emily; “but be assured, that I shall no longer be the means of pro-

longing your misery; I solemnly renounce every claim he may have given me—”

“ Stop!—stop!—do not say so cruel a word for him! you only can deserve him and make him happy, and my children under your protection—O! how joyfully I'll sink to rest!”

Emily, overpowered by such unexampled disinterestedness, was too much affected for speech; and Mrs. Villars wishing to put an end to this trying scene for the sake of both, now produced her watch, to show it was past the hour for Mrs. Fitzclare's prescription, of which, for the first time, Helen had been unmindful; having since her admission into her mother's chamber suffered no one to administer a medicine but herself.

Emily, who had been interested even beyond her expectation, with the artless simplicity and enthusiasm she had found,

was not less desirous than Helen herself of their meeting again in the evening, which was accordingly agreed upon.

Every succeeding hour increased the interest these two *unselfish* beings (if such a word may be admitted) took in one another; equally zealous to promote the happiness of the object of their affection, independently each of her own. In Helen it was only an instinctive continuation of the habit of considering herself as nothing in comparison of him; in Emily it was that never-failing principle of self-controul which governed her every action, at whatever expence to her feelings; for that she felt most acutely, was but too visibly apparent in her altered looks.

Very fain would Mrs. Villars have persuaded her to return to the Priory, without waiting till she should be at liberty to accompany her; but although the accounts of Lord Cranmore began to

wear a more favourable aspect, it was evident that much time must elapse ere he could be allowed to travel ; and while she could be secure from his arrival, Emily felt it a relief to employ herself in some way that was connected with him ; either in taking charge of the little Helen (together with Agatha) while the mother's assiduity in Mrs. Fitzclare's apartment kept her away from the task for which she was far less qualified ; or by preparing Helen's own mind, when they were together, for bearing with equanimity whatever change of situation heaven might have in store for her ; apprehending the effects on her weak frame of too sudden a joyful revulsion ; for it now appeared clearly from Lord Leonard's communication to Colonel Maxwell, that his brother had set out with the full intention of immediately making every possible reparation to his wife and children for the long disgrace he had

so unwittingly suffered to rest upon them.

And here may be the best opportunity for stating the true cause of an ignorance which has not hitherto been fully explained.

CHAP. XVII.

LORD Cranmore (then called Sidney, which name he had taken for an estate left him by a distant relation) lodged in the house of Mackay, during his studentship at Edinburgh, where Helen's beauty and simplicity could not but attract his notice ; he paid her only such attentions however, as his natural politeness might prompt ; but the kind-heartedness which ever marked his manner when at ease, was quickly construed by the artless romantic girl, into particular feeling for her, and she soon repaid it with the most fervent and grateful affection.

It did not immediately betray itself so as to attract the attention of Sidney. The artful unprincipled aunt was more sharp-sighted; Helen's improving beauty had long fed her hopes with the prospect of being in some way or other turned to good account; she saw Sidney was not likely to be easily led astray; she saw too, that Helen was not overlooked by him, and she trusted to time for bringing about some circumstance of which advantage might be taken; but deemed it expedient in the first instance to curb Helen's too natural display of her feelings; fearing that if Sidney took the alarm he might withdraw from the snare ere his own sensibility should be sufficiently awakened. By these means she did succeed in imperceptibly giving Helen a stronger hold upon his affections, than he himself at all suspected.

He returned to his lodgings after the long vacation unconscious of the encreasing dangers that awaited him. He was

struck with the improvement in her person ; could not remain unmoved by the uncontrolled expressions of her delight on again beholding him, and became aware that he was exposing himself to considerable hazard in remaining where he was. Sidney was exactly at the age when the passions are strongest, and reason most easily set aside ; nevertheless he virtuously resolved, to fly from what might be too powerful a trial, and he informed his hosts that he should remove next quarter into lodgings more at hand to the colleges.

Mrs. Mackay now perceived there was no time to be lost, and with her husband's assistance she laid her plan. Sidney was fond of playing at goff, it is severe exercise ; his health being somewhat delicate he was apt to be exceedingly overpowered by the fatigue of it, and she usually persuaded him to take something of more strength to recover him, than his habitual spare living inclined him to ; it was

agreed between them to make use of the first opportunity of drugging his potion, so as to produce inebriety, and seize upon that moment for the transaction which has already been mentioned ; Helen was led to believe it was intended only in playfulness.

The plan succeeded to their utmost wish. It now remained to tutor Helen to change her mode of conduct, and give a loose to the fondness she had before been admonished to repress ; alas ! to the poor innocent victim, this was far the easier lesson. She was told that she was in deed and in truth his wife, though it might not immediately suit him to acknowledge her ; and she by degrees came to feel her conscience securely lulled to rest in the entire reliance on her aunt's sanction. Poor Janet, on whom Helen imposed the strongest oath of secrecy the moment she had fully understood her serious claims, also withheld her former admonitions, being satisfied that

the ceremony was perfectly lawful and binding; the hapless girl therefore no longer contended with her love, and such frequent opportunity was taken of throwing her into Sidney's way, as in an evil hour finally overpowered his better resolves; and the unfortunate connexion was formed from which he had determined with such heroical violence to his own feelings to save them both.

Passion now for a time took entire possession of him; the 'compunctious visitings,' that occasionally obtruded themselves, were in a great measure silenced by his erroneous estimate of Helen's character; frankly and unreservedly as she had given herself up to his love, he could consider her in little better light than a wanton, who had been instructed to ensnare him; his entire unconsciousness of what had passed, and Helen's disinterested resolution never to avail herself of it, concurred to make him place to the account of levity, what only

originated in ignorance, innocence, and a totally unenlightened mind, artfully worked upon.

But Sidney could not long continue satisfied to pursue this disgraceful course, however passionately he felt attached to Helen. He again formed the determination at the ensuing vacation to put an end to it, and obtain of his father to let him return no more to Edinburgh, satisfying himself that a handsome provision for her future subsistence was all the compensation required at his hands. But Helen was now unknown to herself in a situation to urge stronger claims. Never was astonishment greater than her's, when the information was imparted to her by Mrs. Mackay: her delight however, equalled it—the thought of becoming a mother to Sidney's child, was ecstasy.

In Sidney, new feelings were also called up, to which his heart fondly throbbed; but soon and cruelly were these sen-

sations crushed by the recollection of the degraded state in which the hapless innocent would see the light. Yet could he not for an instant turn to the idea of introducing unto his family, such a person as with all her love to him he believed Helen to be. Her beauty—her artlessness, and her fondness, were all the attractions he discovered in her; not one of these could avail with his parents—and the thoughtless levity with which she seemed to have given way to her passion, set a stamp upon her that entirely separated the feeling of esteem from those she had inspired.

Painful as was the effort, he therefore resolutely adhered to a final separation; but desirous to spare as much of the distress as possible, both to himself and her, he anticipated the day of his departure, having made his preparations with a degree of caution that he hoped might have averted all suspicion of his intentions.

There were, however, more experienced

and watchful eyes intent upon his motions, than those of the simple Helen ; the very circumstance of secrecy suggested to the Mackays what he had in view ; and with secrecy more guarded than his own, the wily aunt instilled such fears of losing him, into her niece's mind, on the very evening prior to his departure, if she suffered him to go without her ; that she was worked up to the desperate step of setting out some hours before him with Janet, and way-laying him on his road.

For *this* indeed, he was wholly unprepared — and while with a heart still bleeding from the virtuous effort he had made, he was contemplating the wretchedness his poor girl would experience on finding him gone—she burst upon him at his inn, wildly screaming, “ Oh Sidney ! could you think of leaving me so ? —never—never will I part from you ! ” and fell in violent hysterics upon his breast. The conflict was more than he had power to withstand ; and after some

faint attempt at expostulation, to which she was resolutely deaf, he gave way.

Helen's excessive happiness, in having recovered him, now for a time renewed the intoxication of passion in him, and the birth of the little girl strengthened the tie ; but poor Helen's mind was not calculated to retain the conquest her charms had made ; as passion subsided, reason and principle resumed their empire over Sidney, and many months before the birth of the boy, he had undertaken to reconcile her upon virtuous and religious grounds to their separation. Helen, however, was not in a state to understand his arguments : entirely absorbed in the consciousness that he was ceasing to love her, and strengthening herself in the generous determination of refraining from urging her claim, she seemed to him wholly impervious to all sense of right ; and to all appearance only instinctively acting by him and his child as feeling prompted, without a thought in her mind of any higher motive of conduct.

The old Scotch woman was ready to go out of her senses at the vow of secrecy Helen had exacted from her, when she found her bairn deserted; but no persuasions she could offer were of any avail; and when she had appealed to Mrs. Mackay by letter for her interference, the artful woman preserved a determined silence to her application: little concerned for the reputation of her niece, so that she were fairly rid of her, and willing moreover to lie by for the opportunity which she foresaw might occur of squeezing a sum of money from Sidney to purchase her secrecy.

From this state of the case, it appears that the narrative Lord Cranmore had to impart to Mrs. Villars, could place Helen in no better light in *her* eyes than that of a fond wanton who had seduced the young student; and therefore could have no claims upon him whatever, beyond a liberal provision for herself and children.

CHAP. XVIII.

Emily's desire to protract her stay at Aberystwith to the last moment, was encreased by her affectionate solicitude for Mrs. Fitzclare: she wished to be the means of facilitating the recognition between the mother and daughter; having observed that as Helen perceived her mother's returning sense and strength likely to bring forward the critical hour, she seemed to shrink from it as scarce knowing whether to wish or fear it most.

Mrs. Villars had intended to take

upon herself the delicate business of preparing the poor invalid for the important discovery, willing to spare Emily all unnecessary exertions; but finding her urgent for the task she gave way, upon the farther consideration that whatever served to draw her thoughts out of their daily course, might prove a salutary relief.

Within the last twenty-four hours, Mrs. Fitzclare had shewn an attention to what was passing about her, that made it expedient, for both Helen and Janet to be kept out of her room, till it should be deemed safe to make some preparatory opening to the joyful tidings in store for her.

“ Was it all a dream ! ” were the only words she had yet uttered, as if debating with herself; till on Mrs. Villars one day approaching the bed, she had at length ejaculated ! “ Kind Mrs. Villars ! — what trouble I give ! — may I not see dear Mrs. Delmere ? ”

She was then informed that Mrs. Delmere had been called away, and Emily taken her place; who would gladly come to her bedside, provided she did not exhaust herself by conversation, which was as yet prohibited.

This being readily agreed to, Emily was introduced, and after the expression of mutual satisfaction in the meeting, fetched her work, and made her little establishment by the bedside.

After a considerable length of silence on both sides, Mrs. Fitzclare resumed her ejaculation, "Oh! could it be all a dream?"

"Do you mind dreams?" Emily asked.

"This was so very vivid—she did seem to stand before me."

"Who?"

"My poor lost child."

"As she was when you lost her?"

"Alas yes!—I could not know her now," she added, after a pause.

"What would now be her age?"

“ Just twenty-four.”

Emily did not venture farther—she resumed her work. Mrs. Fitzclare after a little time, began again.

“ It is very strange, it was so vivid—it is upon my mind like the reality—her very self!”

“ I think,” said Emily, who perceived that the emotion of speaking upon the subject began to agitate her, “ you are venturing upon too much exertion—this subject is too interesting.”

“ I could wish to tell you what I saw.”

“ Not now—you have tried your strength enough for the present.”

“ It would greatly relieve me.”

“ We will consult our doctor upon it then ; you know I only act under permission.

A heavy sigh was all the answer ; and in the afternoon the doctor gave greater liberty of speech.

Mrs. Fitzclare instantly reverted to her dream, and related with much emotion

her meeting with the little Helen; describing very minutely the appearance of the child, and the manner of their meeting, though with very confused recollection of the preceding circumstances.

“It is singular certainly,” said Emily, “the very image?”

“O so perfect!—so living!—what could it be?”

Emily was silent.

“Do you think that dreams ever have meaning? are they sent us?” continued Mrs. Fitzclare.

“I cannot tell—they have sometimes a strange coincidence with truth which we can hardly explain.”

“There!” said Mrs. Fitzclare, as she lay with her eyes closed, and her hand drawn over them, “I see her now!”

“I think,” replied Emily hesitatingly, “if the image is pleasing to you, you need not endeavour to banish it from your thoughts.”

“Do you think, Miss Villars,” she said

again, after a pause, “ it can have meaning ?”

“ I do not know,” Emily answered, “ why you should not hope so ; I would encourage you to hope.”

“ Would you ?” she returned somewhat hastily, “ Ah I dare not—I dare not hope.”

A pause ensued ; after which Emily resumed, “ When you are sufficiently recovered not to fear the effects of the agitation, that must always follow so interesting a subject, I shall beg you to give me the particulars of your vain search after your daughter.”

“ They will soon be told—I could learn no trace at all after she left the Isle of Wight ; but too surely I think, if I was now to find her, when I know the life of dishonour she did lead, it would kill me quite.”

“ Was it not from Edinburgh she originally went with Mr. Sidney ?”

“ O too sure it was !”

“ Did it never strike you, in reflecting upon how little is required to give validity to a Scotch marriage, that something may have passed that could not be publicly known, to authorise her considering herself as his wife?”

“ O the blessing of heaven rest upon you for that thought!—what hope you open to my mind by such a possibility! you are my good angel for the bare suggestion—any thing but her fall from virtue I could bear—” and the violent flushing of her countenance showed the agitation of her frame.

Emily feared to go any farther. “ I must not let you agitate yourself,” she said, and turned the conversation.

But the blessed idea had poured balm into the poor mother’s wounded mind; and the following day found her stronger. She eagerly returned to the subject.

“ If I could know she lived innocent, I should feel such consolation for her death.”

“ I really see great reason for such a

hope; and by means of Colonel Maxwell's Scotch connexions, I flatter myself some elucidation of the fact might be obtained."

Starting up in her bed, and fixing a penetrating look upon Emily's face, she exclaimed, "O Miss Villars! you do know something!"

"I certainly know that Colonel Maxwell thinks he may be able to come at something decisive respecting a private marriage."

"Oh blessings! blessings on him!—on you!—oh what shall I say?" a sudden burst of tears long impeded her utterance. "It is impossible to tell what that relief would be to me!" she at length added.

"I cannot divest myself of the idea," Emily resumed, "that your solicitude on that head will be entirely set at rest."

Then after another considerable pause, during which the motion of Mrs. Fitzclare's lips evidently showed her to be

praying, Emily added, “ You seem to consider your daughter’s death as certain—have you ever received any such intimation in your researches ?”

“ No, assuredly I have not—but—but I think is impossible, if she lives I should not have been able to discover some trace somewhere—do you think otherwise ?”

Finding she did not immediately answer, with encreased and almost convulsive eagerness, she cried, “ O say!—is it possible you can think otherwise?—O such hope would drive away my senses!—speak, dear Miss Villars!—for pity speak !”

With considerable hesitation, Emily answered, “ I really can see no grounds for assuming the fact of her death.”

The agitation of the invalid now became so alarming, that quieting drops were recurred to ; and Emily conceiving that she would recover her calmness more speedily for being left alone ; went in

search of her mother to impart what had passed, and consult how much farther she might venture to go in the next conversation; for it became important to hurry the disclosure as much as could be done with safety, from the effects upon poor Helen of the hopes and fears to which she was now a prey; too long accustomed to give way to impulse to find it easy to substitute a better guide, she had appeared nearly in a state of derangement, from the first moment of Emily's undertaking this arduous task. Her uncontrollable impatience was such, that Mrs. Villars scarcely dared trust her out of her sight, lest she should steal into the sick chamber, in defiance of the injunctions laid upon her, to get a glimpse of her mother through the curtains when she could think her dozing.

She had actually been upon the watch for such an opportunity; and when at her return from having attended the children's dinner, she heard the voices of

Mrs. Villars, and Emily in the parlour ; concluding her mother to be asleep, she instantly seized the moment of indulging her imprudent wish, and on tiptoe stole to the foot of the bed.

As she gently drew the curtain aside, Mrs. Fitzclare, supposing it to be Emily, exclaimed with earnestness, “ I am so much better—O tell me again, if it is possible, you think, my dear, my long lost child is good and alive—O it would be happiness too great ! ”

Wholly unprepared for these words, Helen threw herself upon the bed, screaming wildly, “ My mother !—my dearest mother ! can you forgive ? ”—

Mrs. Fitzclare’s convulsive inarticulate sobs, as she sunk back exhausted on her pillow, after having made an ineffectual attempt to clasp her daughter in her arms, now terrified the impetuous Helen into the belief that she had destroyed her mother ; and springing up she ran distractedly about the room, wringing her

hands, and screaming, "I have killed her !
—I have killed her !"

This uproar soon brought Mrs. Villars and Emily to their succour. Mrs. Villars laid hold of Helen, who seemed really beside herself, and authoritatively imposing silence, led her away, leaving the mother to Emily.

"It was her ghost I did try to embrace — it has vanished — wretched — wretched end of all my hopes !" Mrs. Fitzclare faintly murmured.

"You are giving way to vain imaginations, my dear Mrs. Fitzclare," Emily said soothingly, "pray try to compose yourself !"

"Oh ! it was this time no imagination — you could not see."

"Yes, I did see the cause of your agitation, and if you will endeavour to be calm, I will explain—"

"I cannot be calm till I know—"

"I left you dozing, and your mind dwelling upon our conversation."

“ I never was more wide awake—I saw—I heard the words, ‘ my mother,’ ” her emotion amounted almost to agony as she spoke.

Emily judged the reality could scarcely be more trying than her present situation, and said gently, “ You are yet so feeble, I am even afraid of the effects of joy or I—”

“ She is!—she is found !” wildly interrupted the mother, “ it was—it was herself!—oh my merciful God ! accept—accept,—” and with incredible strength raising herself, and turning upon her knees, she ejaculated inarticulate thanksgivings : “ And now—oh now let my eyes rest upon her face !—I will be calm—indeed I will !”

“ We must take some minutes to calm *her*,” replied Emily, “ before we can venture to bring you together ; for she has not been well, and is not strong, and I love her too well to risk her health any more than yours.”

“ *You* love her, Miss Villars!—then I must be sure she is good.” And a flood of tenderness broke from the eyes of the agitated mother, which relieved Emily from all apprehension of the effects of the meeting upon her; leaving her therefore to indulge her tears, she went to assist in pacifying Helen.

In vain had Mrs. Villars been making the attempt; never had this creature of uncontrolled feelings, been less capable of hearing reason; the conflict of contending emotions swelled her heart almost to bursting; she flew distractedly to Emily as she entered the room; “not another minute could she exist,” she said, “without being acknowledged and forgiven.”

“You shall instantly be both,” cried Emily; “I make but one condition—that you do not at present discover to your still weak and suffering mother, that *I* am the person—that it was *my* hand—

that Lord Cranmore sought," faltered Emily, "promise me this!"

"Any thing—every thing, I promise," cried the impatient Helen; "take me but to her to be forgiven;" and she rushed impetuously forward.

Emily opened the door of the sick room, and stayed but at it till she was satisfied from the words she heard them both distinctly articulate, that the senses of neither were overpowered by their strong emotion.

Of scenes such as these, delineation must fall so short, the attempt were vain.

CHAP. XIX.

HELEN no sooner recovered the power of speaking coherently, than wholly unconscious of what in her extreme agitation she had engaged to suppress, she instantly informed her mother of Emily's unexampled conduct, under their relative trying circumstances; and poignantly did Mrs. Fitzclare feel the cruel situation in which her daughter must now place the friend, and the family, to whom she owed so much.

When Emily thought she had allowed sufficient time for the first effusions of tenderness to have in some degree sub-

sided, she felt eager to contemplate the happiness she had brought about. But instead of it, she met the sad surprise of finding the poor invalid in a paroxysm of grief that seemed quite unaccountable, till Helen exclaimed, "It is her love—her obligations to you, Miss Villars, that make her so unhappy—she cannot bear *me* to stand in the way of *your* happiness."

"Good heavens! Mrs. Sidney, did you not promise me to be silent on that head?"

"No never—when?—did you think it possible gratitude could be silent?—I should tell it the whole earth!"

In vain did Emily endeavour to bring to her recollection what had passed. She knew nothing of any such promise, and would not have made it, if she had. In short, Helen was neither then, nor now in a state of mind to know what she said or did; she could only feel.

As the mischief was done, nothing remained but for Emily to exert her utmost

powers of persuasion to soothe Mrs. Fitzclare's regrets. She stated in the strongest terms the impossibility of her ever having enjoyed any thing like happiness on the discovery that must finally have come to light. She then endeavoured to draw off Mrs. Fitzclare's thoughts, by adverting to the new objects of interest still in store for her ; and quickly agreed to Janet's introduction ; only reserving the sight of the children to the next day ; fearing such a succession of emotions, however pleasurable, in her debilitated state. But joy can only kill by its suddenness, and this Emily's judicious preparation had in a great measure saved ; though the exhaustion that followed, both in mother and daughter, was alarming. Mrs. Villars proposed Helen's being laid upon a couch by Mrs. Fitzclare's bed-side full in her sight, with Janet to watch over them both, and preclude all further conversation between them for the night. It did not bring sleep upon its wings ;

their nerves were too strongly irritated to expect it ; but it did produce a repose of mind sufficiently salutary to remove all objection to the introduction of the children the following morning.

That day was one of exquisite enjoyment and uninterrupted explanations between the long separated, long suffering relations. Every succeeding hour encreased their mutual confidence. Mrs. Fitzclare's convalescent state still kept the room in a sort of twilight that did not reveal Helen's emaciated form fully to her observation, and the deceptive brilliancy of her eye and cheek averted all suspicion of her alarming disorder.

Bolstered up in her arm-chair, with her daughter's hand in hers—her two lovely grand-children at her feet, staring up in her face with pretty wonder—Agatha, who had at length gained access to her ' dear Fitz,' watching her every look to see what she could fetch or do for her—the happy invalid looked around

and around her, with sensations of bliss at times too great for utterance. It was only when her eye fell upon Emily's pale meek and resigned countenance, that a momentary expression of anguish betrayed her keen sense of the price at which all this happiness was to be retained.

No sooner did Emily become sensible of this, than she determined upon her own immediate return to the Priory; satisfied with the part she had so successfully taken, yet grieving to think that her presence should be a drawback upon the felicity she had been so eager to promote. Such daily accounts were now however received of the gradually progressive state of Lord Cranmore's recovery, as at least removed *one* heavy load of anguish from her mind.

On the evening previous to the day of her intended departure, Colonel Maxwell called on Mrs. Villars, with a letter from Lord Leonard Ormsby, enclosing

one of a very few lines from Lord Cranmore to Helen, preparatory to their meeting, which might now, he said, shortly be expected to take place; and he trusted to the Colonel's good judgment for not delivering it in so abrupt a way as might prove too trying for her weak state.

"Emily has just been fixing her departure for to-morrow," said Mrs. Villars, "but this will detain her another day; I think she will not suffer this to go through any other hands than hers."

"Do you not fear, Mrs. Villars, that she is carrying this matter too far? this species of self-immolation is almost too much for human nature."

"The self-immolation has been, on Helen's part, to a degree that I could not have conceived to exist in human nature. Emily's heroism is founded on a principle that will never fail to afford the necessary support."

"And yet you see how severe the

conflict!—it goes to my very soul to mark her fading cheek, her sinking eye.”

“ I know my Emily : she will in time recover her tranquillity. It could not be expected she should relinquish such happiness as she had in prospect, without deeply feeling what she was to forego : that could only have arisen from insensibility ; however it is assuredly desirable to put as speedy an end as may be to these struggles. Absence will contribute to strengthen her mind ; on no account must a meeting with Lord Cranmore be risked ; *that* might indeed be fatal to the fortitude of both. I shall wish after this last effort to attend Emily home myself, now that Mrs. Fitzclare’s recovery is making the rapid strides it has done within these last few days.”

“ Aye, take her off for mercy’s sake ! by all that’s good, I have not had a moment’s peace since the angelic creature came to this place. You may confidently

rely upon my watching over the interesting beings you leave here, till all is brought to the desired conclusion."

Emily came into the room, as Colonel Maxwell was leaving it; the unusually anxious expression of his countenance struck her, and she eagerly inquired of her mother what it meant?

"Nothing, but what is perfectly satisfactory, as to the progress of Lord Cranmore's recovery," said Mrs. Villars, as she put a letter from Henry, which the packet had also contained, into her daughter's hand.

"Thank heaven!" she cried, and after a moment's pause, she added, "probably then his arrival may be near at hand! I could wish to prepare Helen for that before I go; though it should occasion the delay of another day."

In attempting to read her brother's letter, her eyes were suffused with tears that made it impossible to get on. "Give way to them, my dearest child," said

Mrs. Villars, seeing them trickle upon the paper, “do not struggle against feelings so very natural, and which must have vent.”

She threw herself into her mother’s arms, and relieved her full and severely tried heart, by weeping for a long time uncontrollably upon her shoulder. “I feel ashamed of my weakness, dearest mother,” she at length said, “but bear with me!—I shall conquer it.”

“I have no doubt you will in time,” was the reply, “but do not aim at too much! —I would not have you a stoic; your present heroism would lose half its value, if robbed of the charm of sensibility; it is the self-controul that regulates, without deadening it, that is the perfection of Christian virtue.

When Emily recovered sufficient composure to attend to the contents of her brother’s letter, she found it replete with affectionate good sense; forcibly exculpating Lord Cranmore, and highly ex-

tolling his present line of conduct, which he said he firmly believed it was the desire to act up to Emily's opinion of him that enabled him to pursue. Henry stated, that his Lordship being now in a state to converse upon the trying topic; he had said, he should not write to Miss Villars as he had first intended; he felt himself no longer at liberty to do so, he was *a married man*; he only requested of her brother to assure her, she should never have cause to blush for the preference with which she had once deigned to honour him.

In this determination, and this assurance, Emily found all the delicacy and propriety that had marked every step of her acquaintance with Lord Cranmore; and with renewed courage from these sympathetic soothings of her brother's and her mother's, she proceeded upon her arduous task the following morning; having received from the hands of Mrs. Villars the important letter.

She found Helen in tears, deploring

their intended departure ; as yet she felt to hold more to Mrs. Villars than to her newly found mother. “ What will become of me,” she exclaimed, “ when you all leave me ? I am now so conscious I cannot guide myself.”

“ Surely you have no cause for fear with such a mother to advise.”

“ Don’t think I am insensible to the blessing of finding her ; but I am conscience-struck before her ; I have tinged her cheek with shame, I dare hardly look up when she caresses me ; I cannot hope for such indulgence from her as you and Mrs. Villars and Mrs. Delmere have shown.”

“ You may rely on every thing that is indulgent, good and kind from her ; but, dear Helen, since you allow me to call you so, you may now also hope in every way for brighter prospects.”

“ You make me happy indeed when you call me, Helen ; I think you love me then ; that’s the only brightner of my

prospects—to think when I am gone, your love for me shall shew itself to my poor children,” again melting into tears.

“ I have reason to think there are brighter prospects in store for you on this side the grave !”

“ Miss Villars !” she cried, starting at the suggestion of her own mind, “ I know you are capable of the most exalted generosity ; but do not carry it so far as to use your influence to make him unhappy ! I would not bear to be his acknowledged wife at such an expense.”

“ Be assured your delicacy has nothing to apprehend from any interference of mine. Lord Cranmore is not the man I take him for, if he waited any suggestion from me to do you justice.”

Helen’s agitation became extreme ; she did not speak.

Emily resumed, “ Knowing, as he must do, your claims—”

“ O !” she interrupted, “ I should not have acknowledged—I did wrong to tell

him the truth; I should only have confessed to Mrs. Villars, to save *you* from being involved."

"Dear Helen! what do you mean? ought the truth ever to be withheld when called for? my brother Henry says, Lord Cranmore was wholly ignorant till—"

"Your brother!—does he know?—has he seen?—O! what has passed?—tell me for pity's sake!" almost inarticulate with emotion.

"Could you doubt the impulse that must sway Lord Cranmore's determination the moment he was aware of your claims?"

"Much time has passed since my letter—he didn't write again—it is your brother is persuading him, Miss Villars—I cannot bear the thought!" and she burst into an almost hysterical passion of tears.

"Compose yourself, pray dear Helen! and rest assured whatever may happen, you owe nothing to any interference of

friends. Lord Cranmore is the soul of honour, and wants no other prompter."

"Is your brother then commissioned?—O! would he not write to me himself?"

"He has written—"

"When?—where?—O give me,—"
with wild earnestness perceiving the letter in Emily's hand.

The letter was directed to *the Lady Cranmore*. Emily gave it with the seal uppermost, and hastily left the room nearly overpowered by her own exertion.

Lord Cranmore wrote thus:

'Most involuntary has been my delay in acknowledging the claims you have with such unequalled generosity forborn to make. Be assured, dear Helen, the part you have acted has raised you in my affection and esteem to a degree, which it will be the business of my future life to prove.

'I have been detained in my way to

you, by a severe accident from which I am so nearly recovered that I hope very shortly to be able to follow the receipt of this letter. Meanwhile take care of yourself, and of our dear children; prepare them to see their father, and receive with your accustomed kindness him who grieves at the years of pain he has occasioned, and will study to make every amends in the power of

‘Your truly affectionate,

‘CRANMORE.’

With that intuitive perception of evil so peculiar to those long familiarised with misfortune, her eye instantly fell upon the words, ‘severe accident,’ and wholly inattentive to all beside, she flew after Emily, exclaiming, “Severe accident!—O! the blessed Virgin, he has met with a dreadful accident! tell me, tell me what, before I go distracted!”

“Dear Helen, do not thus give way to alarm!” said Emily endeavouring to rally her own firmness; “the effects of

the accident are so nearly overcome that Henry expects he will set forward to-morrow."

On hearing the detail of the accident, however, Helen, whose nerves were in a miserable state of irritation, gave way to paroxysms of fears and dreads, so very unreasonable, as finally to conquer Emily's forbearance; and in a tone of reproach she said:

"Surely there is a degree of ingratitude in thus courting unhappiness with a prospect of such unbounded felicity before you, as seldom falls to the lot of woman!"

"Felicity!—before *me*?" cried Helen.

Emily deeply blushing at the strength of her own expression, replied, "Do not the contents of the letter answer to the superscription?"

"What superscription?" turning the letter she held in her hand to look at it,

“ Merciful heaven !—that name to *me*?
—oh ! it cannot, cannot ever be !”

And between sobs and screams, she fell into a violent hysteric fit.

Emily now called for Janet, and made her over to her care, feeling to want nearly as much herself.

During this time, Mrs. Villars had been opening to Mrs. Fitzclare a prospect of happiness gratifying beyond her hopes, which, however, she met with equanimity. In the rapidity of her recovery, within the last few days, the efficacy of content had been exemplified to an extraordinary degree. She was now so nearly restored to her natural state of health as to be fully adequate to take upon herself the tranquillising and strengthening of her daughter's mind for the (to her so new) trial of worldly prosperity, which now dawned upon her in colours sufficiently dazzling to unsettle steadier heads than that of poor Helen. It was agreed between them, that Mrs.

Villars with her daughter and Agatha, should set off the next morning by day-break without imparting the intention to Helen, to obviate all farther *combats de générosité* between the two uncommon rivals.

To this Emily readily assented, and they took their departure at sun-rise. Leaving a kindly explanatory note to be given to Helen at her awakening; whilst Emily more dead than alive should be retracing her sad steps to fly from a man whose mere presence would have been sufficient to illumine the darkest hour of her existence. And narrowly indeed, as will be seen, did she escape the meeting. She had tasked herself almost beyond the stretch of her physical powers; though a slight buoyancy of spirits was again fortunately imparted by the expectation of finding Henry at the Priory, whither he had repaired to justify Lord Cranmore to Mr. Villars, as he would have so much to impart on the only subject that

could at this moment excite any sort of interest.

Helen's tears had flowed in great abundance over this affectionate note. She was disappointed besides, in being deprived of the opportunity of communicating to Miss Villars a scheme she had been devising upon her pillow for the relief of all parties; which she conceived could not but be approved.

She now awaited her mother's rising with the most extreme impatience.

After bewailing in all the strength of her enthusiastic feelings, the loss of the friends she cherished in her very heart's core, she proceeded to inform her mother, "She had come to a determination of withdrawing herself from the possibility of encreasing by her presence the misery she had not the power to assuage."

"What mean you, my child?"

"In a convent I may lay down my head in peace, dear mother, and save Lord Cranmore from the hard necessity

of making a show of affection he no longer feels."

"Dear ! generous ! inconsiderate creature !—you have no right to make farther sacrifices. To replace your children in their proper station in the eye of the world is now your imperious duty."

"Lord Cranmore will himself do that—and you, dear mother, can so much better teach them what is right than the poor ignorant Helen, who feels herself a bar in every body's way—"

"Helen !—I know not how to understand !—is it possible resentment can dictate ?"—

"Resentment !—oh, can you think so ? against whom would I feel it ? I only want to cause no more unhappiness."

"But we have no protestant convent Helen !"

"I would not mind going into a catholic one."

"Dearest child ! is it possible to know so little of distinctions so important !"

Mrs. Fitzclare then entered with much earnestness upon the momentous subject which had hitherto engaged so small a portion of her daughter's thoughts.

Poor Helen wholly uninstructed, called herself a protestant, because in conformity to her lover's faith, she had gone into a protestant church ; but she now for the first time became sensible of the meaning of the word. She listened with attentive reverence to her mother's instructions, but expressed much reluctance to forego her plan.

Colonel Maxwell had gone to attend Mrs. Villars and Emily some part of their first day's journey.

At this unlucky moment Lord Cranmore and Lord Leonard arrived at Aberystwith.

With well-meant caution, the chaise stopped out of sight of the door ; and Lord Leonard proceeded alone to the lodging, to inquire for any of their friends who might have spared Helen the sudden-

ness of the first meeting ; no one was at hand but Janet, and, whilst she was engaged in consultation with him, the children had run out and caught sight not only of the chaise, but of who was in it, and returned bawling up to their mother's window, " Mamma !—mamma !—here's dear papa Sidney come !"

"Where!—where!"—cried the strongly agitated Helen, rushing down stairs and led by them towards the chaise.

Lord Cranmore no sooner perceived her than he alighted, and opening his arms to receive her, exclaimed—

" My much wronged Helen ! my true—my lawful wife !"

" With an eager spring into them she ejaculated, " O ! my Sidney !—this blissful moment indeed repays—"

She could utter no more—her vital powers had of late by such various revulsions been too strongly stimulated for her exhausted frame to support. She sunk lifeless upon his breast,

Fainting fits had become so usual with Helen, that the fatal truth did not immediately force itself upon the observation of those who by this time surrounded her; for the uproar of the children had drawn out both Janet and Lord Leonard—though too late to avert the mischief.

She was taken home, and every possible means resorted to for her recovery.

But in vain!—the thread of life snapped, and her enthusiastic spirit had fled, in a transport of rapture, to that abode where we are allowed to hope that innocence of intention may be pleaded in atonement of error.

CHAP. XX.

THE suddenness of this calamitous event entirely unmanned Lord Cranmore—in- sensible to every surrounding object, he wept like an infant.

Lord Leonard judiciously took away the children, wishing to leave him for the present to the full force of his feelings, which were likely to find their most immediate relief in an uncontrolled effusion of tears.

Colonel Maxwell's surprise was only equalled by his grief and vexation when, at his return, he found the fatal effects of his absence, in the woful havoc a few

short hours had made. To him, of course, devolved the painful task of breaking to Mrs. Fitzclare the sad catastrophe; of which he could not but feel a degree of responsibility to attach to himself, for having even momentarily deserted the charge he had so faithfully engaged to Mrs. Villars and Emily to fulfil.

Mrs. Fitzclare's affliction was great, as may be supposed, but she was not wholly unprepared for parting with the blessing so lately recovered. The last few days had afforded sufficient cause for alarm, by bringing to her observation various indications of Helen's weak and declining state. Her religiously disposed mind, was not long in tracing the great mercies which attended this heavy deprivation. Helen had lived to see and deplore her error and be restored to character—and Mrs. Fitzclare was conscious that however integrity of principle had prompted Lord Cranmore's determination, it was not to be expected that real connubial felicity

could have resulted from their reunion. The mind of Helen was too unsusceptible of due regulation to give him any prospect of home enjoyments; whilst her strength of passion and delicacy of feeling were at the same time too much alive to what *had been*, to be satisfied with all that he would seek to substitute for love; the idea of the sacrifice he had made too, would ever have stood between her and happiness. There was reasonable ground for hope that *happiness* was now her daughter's everlasting portion; and Mrs. Fitzclare became resigned.

As the tumult of Lord Cranmore's feelings subsided, he recovered sufficient recollection to inquire for his children; and the sight of them proved in some degree soothing. "To you at least, my lovely babes, I can do full justice," he exclaimed; "Alas, that my injured Helen!—my heroic self-denying wife, should not have lived to enjoy at least *this* satisfaction!"—and his tears flowed afresh.

Nor could he escape the severest stings of remorse when he reflected on the magnitude of the injury, which, ignorantly and involuntarily, he had done to Helen. Her peace—her fame—her health—her life destroyed by him who had given her his hand, and who judging her unjustly, had withdrawn from her his heart. Then would her unparalleled disinterestedness flash anew upon his mind, in its most vivid colours; and the accumulation of these various feelings caused the shock of her death to sink as deep as if his whole stock of earthly felicity had actually centered in her.

He was very urgent with Colonel Maxwell to obtain him admittance to Mrs. Fitzclare the moment she was able to bear to see him. He believed he had schooled himself into a degree of self-controul that would secure his not increasing her distress by any thing he might say or do; but no sooner did he find himself in the presence of his lost

Helen's mother, than the most irresistible burst of grief impelled him on, to fall at the feet of the bereaved parent, and implore forgiveness.

She extended her hand, which was bedewed with his tears as he raised it to his lips; she motioned for him to rise—she could not speak; neither of them, indeed, were capable of giving utterance to their feelings. The scene was inexpressibly trying to both. Colonel Maxwell was peremptory in abridging it.

Every subsequent interview, however, became more and more consolatory to them. Lord Cranmore treated her with the affectionate deference of a son; and when he became acquainted with her history, and the great respectability of her mother's connexions, it afforded him considerable ease of mind in facilitating the communication he had to make to the Marquis of Kingsborough.

This distressing task he concluded with an earnest entreaty that the most

marked family honours which could be devised, might be paid to his wife's remains.

The Marquis readily concurred in directing every distinction that could best stamp the legitimacy of her offspring in the eye of the world.

She was embalmed ;—Lord Cranmore accompanied by his brother, attended the body to Castle Ormsby, where it lay in state for several days, and the obsequies were finally performed with all the solemn pomp that could be bestowed upon them. Nor can it be denied, that some alleviation was afforded to Lord Cranmore himself, in finding the mother of his children had been entitled to move in a far different sphere from that, in which her father's degraded habits had placed her.

On the day in which the melancholy procession had set out, Mrs. Fitzclare found herself able also to leave Aberystwith, with the children ; and Colonel

Maxwell, who kindly attended them, had arranged such easy stages for their progress, as to remove all apprehension of any danger from fatigue.

Her reception at the Priory was cordial as the tenderest sympathy could make it. Emily's grief was deep and unfeigned; she mourned as for a sister; and the intense feeling with which she took the children to her heart cannot easily be imagined—raising her streaming eyes to heaven at the moment, as if renewing to the departed Helen her full acquiescence in the appeal their hapless parent had so repeatedly made to her affection for them; she brought forcibly to Mrs. Villars's mind those pathetic lines of Lord Littleton's,

'That—that even now, above yon starry pole,
May touch with pleasure her immortal soul.'*

To dilate upon the heartfelt enjoyment experienced in this family reunion at

* Prologue to the tragedy of *Sophonisba*, acted for the benefit of Thomson's widow and children.

the Priory were assuredly superfluous ; a congenial mind can readily figure it, the uncongenial could not be made to understand it.

Agatha alone intermixed her expressions of delight in the arrival of her dear Fitz, and her young playfellows, with the constant repetition of her lamentations at the absence of her aunt and uncle—cousin Ned—without whom no joy ever appeared to her complete.

Indeed, aunt Katty too ! who had hitherto uniformly proceeded with that ‘plentiful lack of thought’ so natural to her, now found herself assailed and confounded by such an influx of ideas, that she scarce knew, as she said, whether she stood upon her head or her heels. “To think how a marriage, which was no marriage, could come to be a marriage after all ! was one way or other, to her the most incomprehensible thing ! turn it as she might !”—no wonder poor Katty should find it difficult, when matters of

no very dissimilar nature have occasionally afforded food for discussion to far abler heads than hers.

In vain had Emily and Miss Maxwell endeavoured, at the expence of much argument and considerable loss of time, to make the matter intelligible to her ; her judgment was so bewildered as to be quite impervious to a new or a distinct perception, though she was both clear and audible in “ praising heaven for the *lucky chance* of taking the mother out of the way, or else what was to have become of poor Emily herself ! ”—and she finally derived some satisfaction from the assurance, that the advantages of the children were confined to the Scotch estates and title ; and comforted herself with the recollection that “ half a loaf is better than no bread—and she only wished the time was come that she might see the happy knot safely tied, and no more work about it.”

It will scarcely be supposed that Lord

Cranmore should have been wanting in every possible attention to the feelings of Emily under these sudden vicissitudes. His letters breathed all that the most refined passion could inspire, or the most scrupulous delicacy exact; but the editor of these memoirs, never having been able to obtain a sight of them, will not venture upon any substitution of her own. The sense and the nonsense of true love must equally baffle the attempts of a mere narrator—who has outlived the days of sentimental illusions too!—and his Lordship was in the height of them. For a model of the Duke of Ulswater's tender effusions, had the original happened to be missing, a reference to some of the diurnal records of passing events might aptly and satisfactorily have furnished it; but sentiments such as Lord Cranmore's are of more rare occurrence; though doubtless many a young female reader must be possessed of *fac similes* from their own devoted admirers, to which

they will have the goodness to recur, as the only chance of doing justice to the correspondence that was daily followed up, till the auspicious moment arrived, when, having paid every duty to the remains of Helen, her widowed Lord felt himself at liberty to give the reins to his eager desire of once more casting himself at the feet of his soul's idol.

Katty's watchful eyes were first blessed with the sight of the carriage, whose rapid advance proclaimed the impatience of its owner to reach the goal of his wishes ; for Emily's agitation was too great to bear the torture of hourly expectation—she had shut herself up in her own apartment.

The scream of delight uttered by Katty, as she caught sight of the horses, brought every one to the window, which was, however, so filled by her own little square immoveable person, that the contents of the carriage were only apparent to herself as it approached ; and a second exclama-

tion, rather in a different tone, created some surprise.

“The powers be merciful to us! what’s coming now?”

And the chaise at this moment stopping at the door, a young woman alighted from it, with a child in her arms—which Lord Cranmore immediately took from her, and rushing into the room with it, he cast a hasty glance around for Emily; then, with something of disappointment, going up to Mrs. Villars, he said, “Lady Sabina’s poor deserted orphan!—dearest madam, is it presuming too much?—I could not, for my soul, resist bringing it away, without even waiting for an assent—I had vowed to protect it.”

“You are quite sure, I trust, of the warmth with which Emily will receive it,” was Mrs. Villars’s reply.

“But where? where is she?”

Emily was now summoned to the library, where the happy lovers were allowed some hours of uninterrupted

unalloyed felicity, only to be appreciated by minds pure, fervid and spotless as their own, ere they were again called upon to join the family circle.

Lord Cranmore had, before leaving Aberystwith, made a provision for his mother-in-law, such as left her nothing to wish ; and she was installed at the Priory Cottage, with her grandchildren, Agatha, and the little deserted infant, where Emily and Lord Cranmore spent much of their time.

Day now succeeded to day in unabated enjoyment. Tranquillity in every heart ; serenity on every brow.

CHAP. XXI.

THE constantly improving accounts of Sir Edward Arundel's health made no inconsiderable addition to the happiness of the Priory fire-side. He experienced the wondrous efficacy of a balsam not to be matched in the whole pharmacopœia—perfect peace of mind. Each morn his eyes opened on the loved object on which they could for ever dwell, and found her whole undivided attention centered in him—solicitous to anticipate his every wish. Death alone could now dissolve this 'sober certainty of waking bliss.'

On Sophia's part, the daily increasing hope of final recovery attuned her soul to harmony with every human being; and the recollection of Patty now rose to her mind, with a keen sense of reprobation of her own injustice, in giving way to the unreasonable prejudice that had banished from her sight, one who had deserved so well of her, and given many unquestionable proofs both of integrity and attachment. Her late change of situation gave her an opportunity of sending both Patty and her mother a token of kindness, in a wedding present; accompanied by a conciliatory note, expressive of her wish to see them at the Priory whenever Sir Edward should be sufficiently recovered to join the domestic circle there, and with this she quieted her conscience for the present.

As he became more able to enjoy society, she put in her claims for Emily and Agatha to join her in town. Agatha was out of her wits with joy to find the

proposal agreed to. Colonel and Miss Maxwell accompanied them, as well as Lord Cranmore and Henry.

It was settled that Emily and Agatha should take up their abode at Mrs. Valacort's, as the morning lessons, intermixed with hours of pretty active recreation, could better be admitted of there, than in the house of an invalid ; and there also Lord Cranmore of course, had *les entrées libres* the moment those lessons were over.

The evening meetings of the friendly circle in Brook-street no ways fell short in social happiness of that which the Priory had lately afforded ; Mr. Valacort often, and Mrs. Valacort not unfrequently (when dinner engagements did not interfere) joining the agreeable groupe, which she could not but acknowledge made a pleasant variety at least, in her habitual pursuits. Being now fully satisfied with Emily's prospect, she no longer insisted upon dragging her into that world with

whose avocations she had not one idea in common ; and indeed, it must in justice to Mrs. Valacort be said, that she did not herself suffer those avocations to obliterate every serious thought, as she had heretofore done ; her Sunday mornings were somewhat better employed ; her regularity was no longer wholly confined to her visiting list, nor was blue-stockingsm so exclusively reprobated as it had been. In short, although it cannot be averred that she was yet qualified to pass muster in the very domestic circle at the Priory, she so tempered her dissipated pursuits as to afford those most interested in her, good grounds to hope that she might finally subside into an unexceptionable rational being.

When the time came for removing Sir Edward to Bath for the benefit of the waters, Colonel and Miss Maxwell attended their friends thither ; whilst Emily returned with Agatha into Hampshire, to resume her share in the cares of Mrs.

Fitzclare. Boxmount Cottage, of course, received its Lord with the determination not again to quit it, till he should feel himself entitled with propriety to claim the hand from which every blessing of his future life was to flow.

Bath proved as beneficial as had been hoped for. The exfoliations from the jaw had ceased, and Sir Edward became capable of taking more solid nourishment. The physicians now deemed the baths of Barêge, together with a winter in a more southern climate, likely to be of use in restoring the power of the leg. This was instantly resolved on; and a few weeks allotted to the Priory previous to undertaking the journey.

Sophia here showed herself to her family, in a light so new, and so beautiful, as quite filled up the measure of their happiness. To her originally impetuous and decided manner, was substituted a quiet, attentive, unremitting assiduity in watching every turn of her

Arundel's countenance, which at times indicated a degree of suffering he would fain have concealed from her; but she as sedulously sought to relieve it with a tenderness, a gentleness, that combined some of Emily's milder graces with the Juno-like dignity of Sophia's natural appearance.

Nor was the reparation due to Patty any longer neglected. Sir Edward's chaise was sent to bring her and her mother to the Priory; where the kindness of their reception soon effaced the sorrow which had hung heavy on the heart of the good girl, from having been so abruptly, and to her so unaccountably, driven from the presence of her beloved lady.

Mary Benson was not slow to impart a prospect of establishment that had opened for her daughter; a respectable young tradesman, whose father was in a good way of business, had made overtures, and as Patty "seemed to think well of him," Mary only waited the sanction of

her patronesses at the Priory to accept him for a son-in-law. The sanction was not withheld ; neither was it unaccompanied with what was likely to make Patty as agreeable an object in the eyes of the prudent father, as she before was in those of the enamoured son.

Aunt Katty's wonderments occasionally broke forth, to form a diverting contrast to the unqualified satisfaction that reigned in every other bosom. " Well, for her part !—the unaccountableness of some people !—refusing point-blank to marry him, when my heart and soul were so set upon it, and he in a whole skin as a body may say ;—and now to go and make a sick nurse of yourself for life !—for you can't deny, my dear, but it must be very inconvenient, though, to do you justice, it must be said you do it so prettily one might almost think there was nothing you liked better." " And not be much mistaken either, dear aunt ; but you

assume my refusal—for he never asked me,” was the playful answer.

“ Merciful sirs, don’t tell me such a thing as that ! when any mortal that had eyes in their head might have seen that if he had had as many lives as that old Plutarch my brother was reading of, he would have been ready to lay them every one down for your sake.”

But enough of good Katty’s nonsense ! so near the close of a narrative which it is earnestly hoped may have awakened some interest for the *Dramatis Personæ*, it is not fair to waste any more of the reader’s patience upon it.

When the time drew nigh for Sir Edward and Lady Arundel’s departure for the continent, she prevailed upon Miss Maxwell to accompany them. Colonel Maxwell and Henry Villars having volunteered their services, the friendly party set forth, with eager and anxious hopes for the favourable result of their journey.

Fain—very fain, would Sophia have taken her little darling with her; but this required her grand-father's concurrence, which he was by no means inclined to grant; adding, in answer to the application made to him, that so far from agreeing to Agatha's being taken out of the kingdom, he must insist upon having her at Rock Castle, now that he found she had a governess to keep her in order.

Lady Arundel could certainly no longer have the same fears of Rock Castle, if Mrs. Fitzclare accompanied Agatha thither; but she so strongly felt the pain this amiable woman would experience in a separation from her grand-children, that she had not the heart to impart to her the contents of the letter. This very forbearance, however, betrayed the matter to her friend, who hesitated not a moment to sacrifice her own enjoyment to the advantage of Agatha, and made light of the effort, by stating the impossi-

bility of her having a moment's anxiety in leaving her grand-children under such unremitting attention as Emily was in the habit of paying to them.

And so the affair was settled ; Mrs. Fitzclare setting out for Rock Castle with Agatha the day before that which was fixed for the departure of the continental travellers. These now bent their course to the south of France, as rapidly as might be without danger of over-fatigue to the invalid.

The invigorating air and clear atmosphere of the continent produced almost instantaneous beneficial effects. Barèges did wonders. They spent their winter at Montpellier ;—visited Switzerland in the spring ; and the following autumn passed over into Italy ; where Sophia had the inexpressible joy of finding Sir Edward able to take his share in every research and object of curiosity that attracted their notice.

And there it was that the tidings for

which Sophia most anxiously looked were finally received, of the long protracted union between Lord Cranmore and Emily having taken place. Lord Cranmore, with the delicacy so conspicuous in every part of his conduct, had refrained from urging the celebration of their nuptials, till the full period should have elapsed that respect for the memory of Helen could claim. Emily well understood and honoured the motives of this forbearance; and when he at length allowed himself to plead his suit, she referred him with her characteristic simplicity to her mother for naming the day that should make them one; only stipulating for the absence of all parade on the solemn occasion.

This condition met the ready acquiescence of all but aunt Katty, whose utmost powers of eloquence were called up to oppose it—but in vain. The only exemption she could obtain was in favour of bride-cake, and she sought her conso-

lation in superintending its composition, which she was determined should at least be the richest that ever graced a wedding.

The sun seemed to rise with more than its accustomed splendour on the auspicious morn that lighted the family of the Priory to the little parish church of Hurstbourne, as if emulous to vie with the bright beams of happiness that illumined every countenance. Never was promise of matrimonial felicity fairer! for it was grounded on that pure basis of

‘ Perfect esteem, enlivened by desire
Ineffable, and sympathy of soul.’

Every impediment that had arisen to their union having only served to raise each in the opinion of the other. And safely may it be predicted, that happiness such as this, will prove as durable as it is perfect.

The travellers, after passing eighteen months in the most interesting pursuits

and uninterrupted enjoyments, now turned their thoughts and steps towards that full fruition of true comfort, which is only to be found in *home*.

They had accomplished the object of their journey to the utmost extent of their hopes and wishes. Sir Edward's health and strength were perfectly restored; the lameness scarcely perceptible; and the wound in his face no more of a blemish than any soldier might covet.

Impatience now urged them on; they gave but a very limited time to Paris, and were proceeding to Calais with all speed, when the danger of one of the springs of the carriage giving way, obliged them to stop at a small village short of Amiens, to have it made secure.

A crowd never fails to assemble upon such an occasion; but one woman in particular eagerly pressed forward, exclaiming,

“ C'est une voiture Anglaise ! au nom de

Dieu laissez-moi approcher ! ames charitables ! bonnes Miladys ! pour l'amour du ciel daignez descendre ! C'est une pauvre femme de votre nation qui est à toute extrémité, et ne veut pas se faire administrer ! le bon Dieu aye pitié de sa pauvre ame !"

The kind-hearted urgency of the poor woman interested them all, and they instantly alighted and followed to her cottage ; where the dying woman lay stretched upon a miserable pallet, which as Lady Arundel and Miss Maxwell approached, they were horror-struck. Gracious God ! could they credit their senses ! was it indeed Lady Sabina ?—the high-born, high-bred Lady Sabina ! so lately the brilliant star of fashion ! the idol of surrounding crowds, they now saw !—sunk in squallid wretchedness—on the very brink of the grave ! a nearly expiring infant lying across her breast, seeking in vain the nourishment no longer there !

Sophia stood lost in speechless amaze-

ment : the wretched sufferer, on recognising her, endeavoured to conceal her face in the bed-clothes, faintly articulating, "Leave me!—leave me!—no one can do me any good!"

"Leave you!" repeated Sophia, in a voice of the tenderest commiseration; "not, indeed, till we see every possible care taken of you and your hapless babe! Where?—where is captain Woodland?"

"O, name him not! the vilest of men! He has basely abandoned me to want and misery of every kind; and but for this poor creature, who has taken me into her hovel, I might have perished with my infant by the road-side—"

Miss Maxwell had, during this time, taken the poor baby, and was endeavouring to feed it with milk she had seen warming on the fire.

Inquiry was immediately made for a physician; there was none nearer than Amiens. Sir Edward's courier was dispatched for him.

Meanwhile Lady Sabina appeared in so feeble a state, that no attempt at moving her could be hazarded on unsanctioned by the physician ; but Sophia causing her medicine chest to be brought, ventured to administer some gentle cordials, of which however, her own compassionate kind treatment proved the most efficacious in producing a temporary alleviation of the broken-heartedness, under which the unhappy woman was sinking.

“ If the poor infant can be rescued from death and from its cruel father, it’s all I have to hope,” she said : “ Nothing can save *me* ; and if I knew what would, I should reject it ; but I entreat you relieve me from the persecutions of these ignorant wretches, who want to force their priest upon me ; they cannot comprehend that a protestant may be saved—”

“ Shall I inquire whether there may be any protestant clergyman within reach ?” said Sophia.

“ O, no! thank you!—all those death-bed scenes are such frightful things!—the very thoughts of it makes me feel worse again already.”

Sophia shuddered at the idea that crossed her mind, on finding Lady Sabina, with the same absence of religious principle and carelessness of duties that had marked her life, now daring to call herself of a religion, of which not even calamity seemed to have awakened a sense in her breast.

During the time that elapsed before the physician could arrive, Lady Sabina had at broken intervals imparted as much as her weakness could allow, of the ill usage she had met with from Captain Woodland; but so interwoven with imprecations and prayers for revenge (the only ones she seemed to have any disposition to utter), that it may be more agreeable to the reader to have the odious recital in as few words as may be.

Captain Woodland, wholly disap-

pointed in the ambitious views which had led him to marry her immediately upon the divorce—finding her cast off by her family as a disgrace to their name; and damages awarded, which, however trifling he was unable to pay; had sold out of the army and taken her abroad, with the intention of establishing a gambling house in partnership with a profligate Frenchman, with whom he had contracted an intimacy during emigration, in the expectation of making his wife's beauty the decoy to bring customers to the gaming table. Unprincipled as she had proved herself, she still shrunk from this last stage of degradation; but he had power sufficient over her to make her write letters to her brothers dictated by him, setting forth their pecuniary distresses; and drawing a picture of conjugal felicity which had not for one moment followed the disgraceful nuptials. These applications were constantly answered by supplies of money, which he as constantly seized upon and

squandered—and when she at length also refused to be made the tool of this dupery, he had proceeded to personal ill usage; and finally turned her out of doors with two louis in her pocket, brutally telling her she might beg her way back to England if her beauty could not help her to the means of getting there on easier terms. At this time she was in the last stage of her pregnancy, and only entreated for house-room till she should be recovered; but the unfeeling savage said she had never been induced to consider his benefit in any thing, so she might take the consequence, for he would not expose himself to having a brat to provide for; and he literally forced her into the street.

She had got as far on her way as the village, where she was now found, when over-fatigue had brought on pains that would have caused the child to be born by the road-side, but for the compassion of the poor woman, who had taken her

in, and attended upon her with true Christian charity, of which, however, Lady Sabina seemed to be fast losing the consciousness in her complaints of the persecution she underwent to induce her to submit to extreme unction.

While Lady Arundel was receiving this shocking detail, and Miss Maxwell feeding and hushing the poor babe to sleep, and the gentlemen had been reconnoitering, whether any decent habitation were at hand, to which the invalid might be removed; a *vacarme* burst forth in the kitchen, ill according with the painful death-bed scene; which Sophia was compelled for a moment to leave, to ascertain what it might mean.

There she beheld Victoire capering about, like a mad creature, embracing the old woman at every turn with screams of delight.

“Have you lost your senses?” her lady exclaimed with some displeasure.

“*Ah mondieu! mondieu, my lady!—*

c'est que c'est Marion Berard! ah quel coup du ciel! qui l'auroit jamais cru!"

"For heaven's sake be still! and tell me who is Marion Berard!"

"Oh, she's mother to my beloved Guillaume, *que je tenois pour guillotiné, et point du tout, c'est qu'il s'est distingué,* and been raised from the ranks, and made a captain; *et voila le sort qui m'attend! je serai enfin Madame la Capitaine!"*

"*Et cette bonne fille ne compte pour rien, un œil et une main de moins!"* said Marion.

"O mon dieu non!" said the tender-hearted Victoire, "*parceque voyez-vous bien avec le traitement de Capitaine on a dequoi se faire servir; et un borgne peut encore se donner le plaisir des spectacles, et un manchot peut encore jouir de la promenade et nous nous amuserons depuis le matin jusqu'au soir je vous en reponds."*

The prospect of Victoire's amusements could not at this very serious moment

bring a smile upon Sophia's countenance, and she authoritatively imposed silence, which Victoire thought "*un peu dur.*"

The physician now arrived, and without hesitation pronounced the case of Lady Sabina to be desperate; and expressed much doubt of the life of the child. All that the utmost good-will could do for either, he said, was to procure such alleviations of suffering as the situation they were in would admit of; an attempt at removal might prove instantly fatal. This opinion was delivered with caution out of the hearing of the patient, who seemed anxious, notwithstanding what she had at first said, to be saved from any increase of apprehension; and before he came, had begged of Sophia, that if he said any thing very alarming, she might not be told of it.

There was a *chateau* in the neighbourhood, with the master of which the physician was well acquainted; additional mattresses and conveniences of various

kinds were obtained from thence ; and the family being absent, and well known for their charity and hospitality, he made no scruple of putting the travellers into possession of it for a few days, as they seemed so anxious to await the event.

They were not long detained ; for on the third day, this wretched victim of vanity and want of principle breathed her last ; and the poor infant, notwithstanding the tenderest care of Miss Maxwell, who had taken the entire charge of it, outlived its miserable parent but a few hours.

They only staid to secure every thing being done in the best manner for the deceased, of which circumstances would admit. Marion Berard was handsomely rewarded for her compassionate cares ; and Victoire made over to her happy prospects : Sir Edward having made a considerable addition to the means of amusement, to which she so eagerly looked forward ; and his charming wife

really rejoicing to leave her well provided for, as she had made herself very useful during their travels, although evidently not actuated by motives in themselves sufficiently attaching to have given rise in her lady to any wish for her continued services.

CHAP. XXII.

THE travellers now uninterruptedly pursued their route, and finally reached the Priory, where they were received with transports that baffle description.

Aunt Katty's joyful exclamations were of course the most audible; it was absolutely in screams that she uttered her delight, on seeing "Sir Edward Arundel looking for all the world just like any body else!—and walking upon both legs! and from the very bottom of her heart she congratulated him upon the recovery of his jawbone!"

If Mrs. Valacort judged rightly in sup-

posing the bent of Miss Maxwell's education was to qualify her for a life of single blessedness, certainly Lady Sarah deviated from her habitual good judgment in allowing her to join the continental party; for dangerous to the security of the heart is the daily and hourly intercourse and similarity of pursuit in travelling! Henry Villars and Marianne Maxwell were not long in proving the truth of this assertion. She certainly was not the 'counterpart of his sister Emily,' that Henry had declared himself 'prepared to fall in love with;' but when did love ever take the prepared way! neither did he tumble headlong into the tender passion, as he had expected to do. It worked its way by such imperceptible degrees, that he was never more surprised than in detecting the extraordinary sensation of misery that took possession of him, as the day approached that was to separate their happy party. On her part, her natural quickness of

observation had not failed to penetrate through the reserve of Henry's manners to the graces of his mind, so that his participation had soon become indispensable to her every enjoyment. Colonel Maxwell observed the growing partiality on both sides with delight, and it will not be supposed that any difficulties arose with Mr. and Mrs. Villars, or Lady Sarah Maxwell, when appealed to for their concurrence, to link two more votaries in Hymen's rosy fetters; for never did his chains play lighter on hearts, than over those now so happily reunited at the Priory.

The presence of Agatha and Mrs. Fitzclare was not long wanting to complete the domestic groupe; and with the surprising addition of Mr. Arundel himself! He was become the most devoted slave to Mrs. Fitzclare's will and pleasure, whose anxious aim was to conciliate the various wishes of those most immediately concerned in Agatha's welfare; her mild

sense and gentle manners had so won upon his favour, during her stay at Rock Castle, as to leave her not only the uncontrolled direction of his grandchild, but the most entire command, had she chosen to assume it, of all the old gentleman's possessions, clogged only with the condition of accepting his hand into the bargain. This, however, she had steadily resisted, to the great wonder and admiration of Mrs. Arundel, whose jealous fears had made her sufficiently disagreeable on the first discovery of her cousin's inclinations, but who was now ready to worship the disinterestedness she could not at all comprehend.

Having secured such a fund of heartfelt happiness to all those who may have created themselves an interest with the reader in the course of these pages, it still remains to fulfil the less pleasing duty of an accurate biographer, in winding up the fate of some other personages,

who have proved of too much importance to be passed over.

To take up as little time as possible with Lady Laura, it will be sufficient to say, that continuing to be foiled in her matrimonial speculations, she is fast sinking from a mortified, into a neglected coquette ; and now verging on the desperation of old maidenhood, a crabbed discontent is gradually taking possession of her features, which will very decidedly exclude *her* from ranking with the happy phalanx of Lady Sarah Maxwell.

Lord Belmont, with no worse original propensity than an inordinate vanity and a deficiency of principle, had fallen imperceptibly to himself from the fair promise of his youth. Emily had been the day-star that called his ephemeral virtues into being ; they died away as her influence was withdrawn, and left him to sink by degrees into the degraded state of a mere fashionable profligate. Tricked, out of the woman that would

have embellished his existence — disgraced in his matrimonial connexion — plundered, and then deserted by the worthless female he had subsequently selected, more for her celebrity than any other charm ; his health is falling a rapid sacrifice to the excesses in which the wretched blank of his enervated mind involves him ; he turns with horror from the poor infant who might yet give an interest to his hours, because he does not believe it his own ; not having the candour to ascribe his wife's misconduct, in the first instance, to her mortified vanity at his early neglect of her, but allows himself to suppose she was never for a moment faithful to him. The present division of his time, between the bottle and the gaming table, is already producing symptoms of premature old age, which will shortly leave his father to the severe consciousness of having by his worldly-mindedness counteracted talents that might have reflected honour upon him.

self and upon his family ; or rather leave the world so to moralize, for the Earl of Saltland is not of a disposition to trace back misfortune to any error of his own ; he can only curse his stars ! and arraign the justice of Providence.

The sting of disappointment, however, sinks deep in the overturn of all his ambitious views for the aggrandisement of his family ; in vain does he urge his son to make a second choice ; the very name of matrimony is grating to his ear ; and the Earl in bitterness of spirit gives way to a state of depression that verges upon hypochondrium, under which the resources of his Countess are not likely to afford him much relief.

The union of Lord Leonard Ormsby with his lively well-jointured Irish widow is productive of as much conjugal happiness as the avocations of high life allow time for ; their mutual liking had arisen from the most received notions ; on her part it rested on his rank, handsome per-

son, and lively conversation ; on his, on her agreeable attractive manners, avowed admiration of him, and ‘ though last, not least,’ considerable jointure !—their inclinations are fortunately suited ; and to their credit be it told, their relish for each other’s society decidedly outlived that first fashionable fortnight of seclusion, which has so frequently summed up the whole of domestic enjoyment the ‘ happy couples’ have ever known or cared for. They have already celebrated more than one anniversary of their marriage, and actually continue to see each other some part of most days ; express an interest in each other’s pursuits ; and are generally quoted in their respective fine sets as patterns of connubial felicity.

The prospect of Mr. and Mrs. Valacort, in this respect, has brightened considerably under the influence of their new niece, Mrs. H. Villars, who proves a most able auxiliary in carrying on what Emily had,

with the assistance of the broken arm, so happily begun ; for although this fashionable pair were contriving to hurry through life in a way that left no immediate leisure for a consciousness of solid deficiencies, they had ‘that within’ which would finally have made them sensible of the hollowness of the world to which they so entirely leaned, when it might have been too late to find any rest in more rational pursuits.

Should any fair critic, in her zeal for poetic justice, deem that in leaving Colonel Maxwell to the forlorn condition of an old bachelor, he is not dealt with according to his merit ; she is requested to bear in mind that such a niece as Marianne, having selected for him such a nephew as Henry, and by their joint urgency obtained his making their house his home, nothing can be less like the natural fate of an isolated individual than that which seems to await him ; even should Mrs. Fitzclare abide as steadily

by her objections to a second engagement, as she had professed in the case of Mr. Arundel ; but the real fact is, that at this present writing every member of the Villars' family are inclined to believe her not wholly indifferent to the impression her virtues have made upon the Colonel ; and however wary his long knowledge of the world has made him, it very clearly appears that he no longer shrinks as formerly in dread of Benedict's fate.

Leave we the result to his deserts and his friends.

Having now adverted to all those who are entitled to excite any interest in these pages, one observation remains to be made before laying down the pen, lest a suspicion should have arisen of a deficiency in the author, of that laudable zeal for moral improvement which converts so many works professing to be novels, into homilies. The honest truth then is, that with all possible respect for

such good intentions, Lady Humdrum (whatever anticipations to the contrary, her name may have suggested) dissents from the expediency of thus attempting to trick the world into goodness; inasmuch as the end is apt to be so cruelly defeated by the wicked propensity in the novel readers of these our days, to skip, whenever a little *tirade* of salutary preaching obtrudes itself; or by the equally subversive effect on such occasions of a gentle doze stealing over the faculties of the more determined readers, who wade through thick and thin.

It is purposely, therefore, that many an opportunity of enforcing a precept, or 'pointing a moral to the heart,' has been passed by; but it is earnestly hoped, that neither the pious *self-control* of Emily (at all times its own reward, and in her, so highly rewarded), nor the dangerous *self-confidence* of Sophia, in which *her* all of happiness was so nearly wrecked, will miss their aim for trusting

the application to the sagacity of those readers, who, even in a work of this trifling description, may happen to look for improvement; whilst those who merely seek amusement, will undoubtedly give their sanction to the plan of keeping the narrative unbroken, and leaving the heroines to preach only by their example.

THE END.

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